

## MICHAEL LOKTEFF

### Life Dedicated to God

*«For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. » Eph. 2:10*



Michael Danilovich Lokteff was born into a Christian home on July 16, 1937 in Kulja, China. His parents fled Kazakhstan in 1930 to escape persecution and oppression of Christians. Their mill was confiscated, and his grandfather was placed in concentration camp. This was a difficult time; they had to flee in the cover of the night. The people who helped the families to escape did it for money, but if they were caught, they would have been executed. While fleeing, they tried to hide off the grid so that they would not be noticed. All that they could take with them was their children and a few necessities transported by the horse. The father, mother and Lydia, a toddler at that time, traveled along the stream

in a carriage. When the horse stumbled, the little one fell into the water. Since it was the night, the parents did not notice anything. When they came to the border, they noticed that the child was not there. The accompanying people were rushing them because they wanted to cross the border by sunrise, but the father returned to look for the daughter. By God's mercy, she was found safe and sound, and joyfully played in the stream.

By sunrise they successfully crossed the border. They lived in a small town of Kulja for 15 years.

After China became Communist, about five thousand Russian immigrants fled to Shanghai, which took a few months. The food was provided through gathering it in the forest and hunting game and was prepared on the fire. They traveled through

the forest not to be noticed by the Russian soldiers who intercepted the refugees and returned them to the Soviet Union, into Kazakhstan. Upon their return, many were deported to prisons and camps in Siberia, and only a few lived through those severe conditions.

The Chinese were kind to Russian refugees. When Russian refugees were traveling through big cities, they stayed with the American and the English missionaries. The traveling caravan had about 20 families. Upon their arrival to Shanghai through the International Refugee Organization (IRO), the refugees appealed to the United Nations (UN) for help. Out of all of the world's countries, only the Republic of Philippines with their President Elpidio Kirino agreed to accept Russian refugees but only for 4 months, which was extended to two years.

The refugees were transported on the war ships to the Philippines' island Tubabao, which had a war base of the U.S. They lived on an island in a tent village approximately from 1949-1951. When the military exercises were over, the American army left the island and left everything behind: produce, books, and movies. The refugees had a good supply of provisions for a while. Children ages 12-13 got exposed to an American culture through the movies that were left behind. They really liked the westerns.

Among the Russian refugees, there were educated teachers who organized a Russian school where children could learn Russian language in addition to English.

Peter Grigoryevich Omegin (whose real last name was Shelokhvostov, but he exchanged it for Omega or Omegin, because his last name was hard to pronounce in English), helped the Lokteff family to find a sponsor in the States. Having received the permission to move to the United States, they moved from Philippines to San Francisco.

They traveled on the war ship for about 10 days, during which they found out what seasickness is the hard way. In San Francisco the local Christians and church pastor Peter Potlov greeted them. After some time, the Lokteff family moved to Sacramento where P. G. Omegin was waiting for them.

This is what Michael Danilovich says about their life in the States.

*"I was 13 when we arrived to the States. We ended up in Bryte Church which is now in West Sacramento. Two Orthodox teachers came to our church and offered us to start a Russian school, which would have taught only grammar*

*and not religious issues. Because we moved from one country to another, we were uneducated. We went to school to learn Russian.*

*At 13, I went to the Junior High and studied English; I already knew some English because we studied it in Philipino. I continued learning English with ease. I graduated from High School and studied to become a teacher. At that time, there was war between the United States and Vietnam. I was not drafted because I was a student. After finishing my education I was hired as an English and Art teacher. I was working in the Washington High School. I also enrolled to a university and after graduating, I worked as a teacher for about 18 years.*

*When we came to Bryte Church, Pastor Omegin P. G. greeted us. The Church was very small and we began to build a new one. We received assistance from the Southern Baptist Convention. Brother Zabudskiy arrived from Shanghai and began children ministry; he was very loved by the children.*



*Omegin P. G. established a church in Sacramento and was its pastor before Karpets F. P. The pastors at Bryte Church changed many times because of their relocation to other places until my father Daniil Terentyevich Lokteff became the head pastor.*

*New people arrived, and the church began to grow. The church was musically gifted because we had 2 conductors who both played the piano. My two brothers took American wives and went to English-speaking churches. I loved our congregation and remained in a Russian church. I was a Sunday school teacher and in charge of singing in the church, and was elected as the Youth President in the PCSBA for four years. I did not want to become a pastor; I felt that this is not my ministry, but teaching children is my calling.*

*My uncle, Michael Terentyevich Locteff opened a Christian Broadcast Station in 1960, which was called "God Calls", and I was fully involved in this ministry. After work I drove to the studio, recorded sermons of N. Vodnevskiy, Kuzmenkov, and other preachers.*

*In 1960 I married wonderful and humble girl Nadyezhda Omegina. God sent me a wonderful, lifelong helpmate, who shared my labors and helped me in all things. She took the full responsibility for raising four children. After work I came home for dinner, and then left to the studio. As a wife and mother, she took care of all of the household responsibilities.*



*Lodi, which is a small town located not far from Sacramento had a small Christian radio station which reached Sacramento. It was an international station. I met all of their employees and offered our Russian program for broadcast. We brought cassettes with recordings of our preachers to the studio, which charged a fee of \$30 per month for broadcast. The program was aired once a week on Sundays. We had the desire to reach those Russians who are outside of the church. This ministry continued for about 10 years until this station was closed down.*



*In 1964, our family went through a tragedy, which made the national news. My wife's older brother Benjamin, who was a pilot and seminary student, came to Sacramento for the summer. During this time, Billy Graham Crusade came to Fresno. Benjamin rented a small plane and offered to take a few young people, including my younger brother, and went to Fresno. After the crusade, they never made it back home. Both the government officials, as well as our families organized an emergency search and rescue. There were no traces of the plane or its passengers. It is hard to describe what we felt during this time.*

*After 32 years, one hiker in the mountains of Reno saw something shiny far in the distance. Being intrigued, he went to the spot and found the remains of the plane, human remains, and someone's paperwork. Finally, we were able to find out what happened to our relatives.*

*Surprisingly, the tragedy that we experienced united our families even more so that we became much closer to each other than before.*

*In 1971, brother Efimov A. with his wife and Romanov spouse visited a few churches in Russia. Since Communists were in authority during this time, they were watched as international tourists who visit Baptist churches. During their visits to churches, they would serve by preaching and singing. Having discovered their participation, the government officials cut their vacation short and sent them out of the country.*

*In 1972, Brother Efimov A., Romanov K., and Vodnevskiy N., opened the "Word to Russia" Mission, which is active today. The main goal was and is to this day: "To share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to teach those who are near and far to obey the commandments of God." From the organization of this mission, I ministered there as a volunteer.*

*Over the course of our work in the mission, we helped the Christians in Russia, who suffered because of their faith in God. In 1980, A. Efimov and K. Romanov*



*offered me to form a group of Americans and go to Russia. A group of 25 people was formed with me as a guide. Nadyezhda's and my luggage was extremely precious – suitcases with Bibles and money in my socks. This money was meant for the underground printing press, which serves in the worst possible conditions, 24/7. The Christians, who ran this printing press, were dedicated to their ministry and gave their life to God; despite the great danger, they printed Bibles and New Testaments and spread them around the Soviet Union.*

*When we arrived to Moscow, we went through customs. I was extremely nervous but had faith that God will help us. As my turn came, the customs official with a sense of irony asked me: "What does such a small person*

transport in such a big luggage? Probably Bibles, isn't it?" I told him that I have many relatives here and I am bringing them gifts, which really was the case. However, I was thinking to myself "He will want me to open the luggage".

## Lokteff: In 1980, he used ruse to deliver money in Moscow

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That's how many Russian immigrants now reside in the Sacramento region, an area that hosted fewer than 10,000 as recently as 1980. Lokteff is one of those old schoolers, and as the immigration tide wave has moved and crashed over Sacramento, perhaps no one has had a more patriarchal influence than the conservative radio missionary. Arranging housing, arranging for getting kids into school, teaching local Russian radio programming, translating documents, transmitting everything. Dispensing knowledge. Knowing the answers. Being The Guy, no appointment other than that of his own heart.

He is certainly one of the valuable people in our community," says Vladimir Sin, choir director of the First Baptist Church in Sacramento. "He has played a tremendous role in our community. Thank God for Michael."

Many of the new immigrants know Lokteff's voice long before they know his face. Back in the Soviet Union, they listened by shortwave radio — some decade or more — to "Word to Russia," the gospel program Lokteff still produces at a back-room studio in West Sacramento.

His country was a country where atheism was mandated by government. Lokteff's radio broadcasts would bring instruction in the gospel message, along with minutes of recorded sermons and prayers.

By 1979, the 64-year-old Lokteff had a trusted and familiar name in the Slavic community. In his first formal leadership role, Lokteff had ever held in the Slavic community — unless in his brief stint as a lay member in a church of about 30 members.

asked him to be president of the Slavic Christian program for the Slavic Community Center. "His reputation in the community was so great, to have him."

okteff how all of this has come to be, and he hugs his beard and turns his eyes to Nida, his wife. More than a half-century



Michael Lokteff talks recently with church member Nikolay Waden.

ing his family to America. Since then, it's been one crazy blur. One minute, Michael was a high school teacher and they were raising a handsome family in the Ryrie neighborhood of West Sacramento.

Next thing you know, Michael was in Moscow, dodging the KGB by pretending to be a jogger. Then he was back home again, transmitting shortwave gospel messages to Russia. And then he was back in Sacramento, breaking apart — and somehow it all led to a throng of needy immigrants parading to the Lokteff doorstep, almost overnight.

"I just remember the phone ringing continuously," says Dena Young, one of the Lokteffs' three grown daughters. "He was always helping somebody — with paperwork, getting into a home, settling a conflict."

Immigrants kept arriving, and Michael's pickup kept motoring here and there, carrying furniture and food, direction and reassurance.

"I seem to be attracted to people who are in trouble and they seem to be kind of pick me out."

"That's the guy!" Michael says, with a low chuckle. "I can never walk past a (panhandler) without him stopping me. Other people seem to walk by just fine, but I get stopped every time."

That's why I always carry a lot of change. To immigrating Russian families, Michael and Nida had something else that was rare and precious: a thorough understanding of both the world they were coming to, and the world they were coming from.

Michael and Nida were both immigrants themselves, decades ago. Both had been born in China after their families fled

stead. As an educator, he was not a suspicious figure. They would organize a tour whose stated purpose was to show tourists the preparations being made for the 1980 Olympics in Moscow.

The tour was just a front for Michael, who spent three weeks slipping away to clandestine meetings at parks, stadiums and back rooms — often with wads of sweaty cash stuffed into his sock.

"I established very early in the trip that I would go jogging every morning," Michael says. "I know that the KGB people who were watching us were probably not top-line guys — just guys who probably needed a little bit of extra money."

"They'd probably gotten drunk the night before, and they weren't about to chase me down the road at 6 o'clock in the morning. And that's how I would get away to meet with people."

Somewhere along the line, in interacting with the Russian people, Michael's soul stirred. He came home, proudly resigned his teaching job, and dove full-time into "Word to Russia."

"Needless to say, we were pretty grateful to America and Americans," Michael says.

Michael picked up English so quickly that he was soon tutoring many of the American students around him. He married Nida in 1960, landed a teaching job at nearby Washington High School, and soon was the proud papa of three daughters and a son.

It was an impressive and pleasant place for a former refugee child to be. He even found time to immerse himself in volunteer work with a new radio ministry: "Word to Russia."

But by 1979, "Word to Russia" was ready to do more than simply broadcast. The ministry committed to smuggle large amounts of cash to underground Christians in the Soviet Union; the money would be used to build a printing press, which could reproduce portions of the Bible for distribution.

Also, there were letters and photographs of imprisoned Christians that needed to be smuggled back out of the Soviet Union, where they could be brought to the attention of the outside world.

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community sought Michael's counsel on all manner of personal conflicts and ethical concerns.

His influence was on display last summer, when Ukrainian immigrant Nikolay Solovy was at large for 10 days after killing six family members. Lokteff and other leaders helped convince a shaken Slavic community that—unlike in Russia—the police and government agencies could be trusted.

When Solovy was captured in his mother's back yard, it was the fugitive's family that made the phone call to police. (Solovy later hanged himself in jail.)

"Michael is very patient in his expression and his opinion," says Viktor Chernyevsky, administrator at Bethany Slavic Missionary Church. "He's a small man, but he's a very strong man inside."

"I had done that trip as an adventure — not a call of God or anything," Michael says. "But it touched me personally. I realized that the people there really needed to hear the choice of whether to believe in the gospel or not. They were denied that opportunity, and something in me as an American rose up (against that)."

For 10 years, he had no way of knowing how many listeners were hearing "Word to Russia." He has a fair idea now.

"It's amazing," says Dena, his daughter. "I went into a Russian home just the other day, and they found out I was Michael Lokteff's kid, and immediately it was like, 'Oh, Michael! I remember hearing your dad when I lived in Russia!'"

"I get that all the time." With Nida working for an evangelical aid organization and Michael working every resource angle he could think of, the Lokteff home quickly became an impromptu clearing house of services and information.

"Sometimes we'd try to escape to the back yard," says Nida, 60. "But they'd come around the side and find us there, too."

Logistical and immigration questions were only part of the

city, and Michael has tried to pare down his schedule since Nida was diagnosed with fibromyalgia in 1992.

He has hopes of getting back to his painting, a love since his childhood. He wants to help Nida move with her gardening.

Nida smirks wryly at the very idea. Papa Lokteff will never walk past anyone in need, or any situation where he can be useful. If he's not representing Russian community interests in the development of a West Sacramento teen center, then he's meeting with local Latino leaders to explore ways the two cultures can connect and help one another.

He will never stop. Not really. It is the way with genuine father figures.

"You know, he really is amazing," Nida says. "He just has a way of dealing with people. They recognize his honesty and sincerity."

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Section L

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The athletes, who were behind us, started to voice their irritation at me stalling; they were late to their sports event. The customs official told me: "Go" and even pushed me out without checking. That is how I smuggled this valuable luggage under God's protection into Russia. Everything that I brought—money and Bibles, I entrusted to the reliable hands to distribute one part in Moscow, and the other in Kiev.

The main goal of the tourist group was to visit big Baptist churches in some of the Russian and Ukrainian cities. We visited the church in Moscow on Malovuzovskiy, in Kiev, in Leningrad, and other cities. Everywhere we went, we saw that there was no freedom for Christians. Wherever we went, we had to be careful, because we were followed. Upon my arrival to Moscow, I set a schedule to run about 30 minutes every morning. During the hotel registration, I informed the porter about that. One day, as I was jogging in the park located close to the hotel I heard a familiar song "Podmoskovie Vechera", which

*pierced my heart. I stopped to listen to a beautiful melody of the bells and cried. I learned this song with Russian ladies who came to study to Davis, CA. I did not know that this song was very popular in Russia. Something touched me very much in that moment. I was filled with so much love to these people, I had a desire to serve these people, and I asked God: "Lord, how can I serve these people?"*

*When we were in Kiev, I visited a church where G. P. Vince was a pastor. During my short sermon, I saw a woman who came into the church. This was a woman who was working as a janitor at the hotel where we were staying. Once she told me that I am not like everyone else, I always smile despite the fact that life is full of difficulties and problems. I explained to her that I was a Christian and that my joy was in the Lord. I also invited her to church telling her that Christians are very kind and good people. In response, I heard: "Good? They sacrifice their own children!" She was now here at the church. After the church service was over, she approached me and said, "It's a lie then what people say about Christians. These are such wonderful people! If my family will allow me, I want to attend these services".*

*During this trip I was given a Christian magazine, which is illegally printed. When I was returning home, the customs workers found this magazine. They checked all my paperwork and told me "You are suspicious: born in China, moved to America, speak Russian", and after extensive talks, they banned me from entering the Soviet Union in the future.*

*After my return home, some time has passed and I was offered to be a director of the mission because brother A. F. Efimov was transitioning to minister among the Jews in San Francisco. The desire of the founders of this mission was to have the Word of God in every house behind the "Iron Curtain", that is what we called the Soviet Union. We prayed for God's help, and saw His hand in the support that we received. At first, the KGEI studio offered help through the radio broadcast. Nikolay Vodnevskiy, who was a friend of Aleksandr Efimov one of the mission's founders, wanted to participate in the ministry with his talents as a poet and article writer. During this time, the "Word to Russia" Mission began establish "Help to Alcoholics" Program, through the radio station of Alaska, and Olga and Anatoliy Kuznetsov began to record the children programs "Pages of the Bible". Radio stations on the island of Saipan, Kito-Ecuador and Trans-World Radio offered their time to broadcast our*



*programs. This was the beginning of our ministry. Our small church of Bryte greatly supported this ministry financially. I had to leave my job where I had medical insurance and income. My wife agreed that I should minister in full capacity. I also had to leave the conductor's ministry at the church. I began to visit American churches with presentations of our ministry, as well as collecting financial support for this ministry. My wife worked for a minimal wage but never complained. After a few years, she received a position in the office, that helped immigrants to come to America."*

Currently Michael Danilovich serves at "Word to Russia" Mission. Despite a huge load of ministry, he is a caring husband and exemplary father of four - three daughters and one son.



Ministering to a great number of people through the "Word to Russia" Mission, radio broadcast to children, opening of studios in the former Soviet Union and radio broadcasts there, distribution of CDs and DVDs with recordings of Christian programs, 24/7 internet streaming, help to the Uzbek and Georgian nations in printing of Bibles in the native language, support of the Israeli Rehab Center, - this is

only a small list of things that the “Word to Russia” Mission accomplished during the time when Michael Danilovich was in leadership.

As a restless minister, he is an example of what can a person accomplish if he is resolved to be completely obedient to God.

Emily Guseva

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