Carolina-Moscow Connection IS Made By Warrenton Pastor

By KAY HORN

Brent Kasey’s diary entry for October 31 reads, “Long day; long lay-over, long flight.” That’s how you get from Warrenton to Moscow.

And the end of the day wasn’t the end of the journey because Kasey’s destination was Lipetsk, a city of 500,000 people 300 miles south of the Russian capital—an 11-hour train trip Kasey succinctly describes as “a hot ride.” Temperatures on the train approached 90 degrees.

Kasey, the pastor of North Warrenton Baptist Church, was in the former Soviet Union under the auspices of a Mississippi-based organization, Maximum Evangelism. Evangelism was indeed maximum, but all else—including ventilation in train cars—was minimal.

Winter had long settled on the city of Lipetsk when Kasey arrived, but the dreariness he experienced was not caused solely by nature. The colors, shapes, and sounds that characterize Western cities of comparable size were nowhere to be found. What Kasey saw was a city “that looked like it was under construction.” But it’s not under construction; it’s simply under repair, constant repair home of efforts to “make do.”

The hospitality of the host family more than compensated. “They provided their best for us; no doubt about that.”

Their first full day in Lipetsk, the mission team, which included one other North Carolinian, Jay Roberts of Graham, had their first taste of the arbitrary nature of Russian bureaucracy. Their application for a permit to preach was denied because of a “requirement” of 10 days advance notice. No problem, their Christian guide said, the worst that could happen would be that they’d get arrested and if that happened, Maximum Evangelism would send somebody from Moscow to get them out.

Brent Kasey went to Russia to preach the faith boldly, but for a moment, he wondered how bold he really wanted to get.

The certified-public-accountant-turned-preacher came to North Warrenton 16 months ago, having relinquished the business desk for the pulpit. In Russia, he gave up the pulpit for the street. And the bus station.

At the Lipetsk bus station, the three-member evangelism team took their places and began their ministry—one was to sing, one was to give a testimony, and one was to preach a short message.
GENERATION™—Brent of North Warrenton Baptist 30 days in Russia this past fall about 300 who meet regularly for of government reprisal.

Putting in the safety and comfort of North Warrenton Baptist Church, on his trip to Russia and his con-

and found two reminders of home—Pepsi and hot dogs.

owned or fast food or the freedom we have in making decisions.

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Missing were familiar city sights—gas stations, restaurants, department stores, and grocery stores. Kasey figures there had to be a grocery store, but he never saw it. Black-market gasoline was available in cans from vans parked at random along the roads. The roads were none too good and travel was a luxury.

Kasey stayed with a Russian family that was actually expecting him a week later. (Modern communication, like ventilation, is minimal.) The apartment was on the fifth floor of a nondescript building where three or four rooms could house two or three generations. As Kasey listened to a rat scamper in the wall one afternoon, he could only hope it would tire itself out before nightfall. While accommodations left much to be desired,
THE PEPSI GENERATION™—Brent Kasey, pastor of North Warrenton Baptist Church, spent 10 days in Russia this past fall membership of about 300 who meet regularly with minimal fear of government reprisal.

Back home, sitting in the safety and comfort of the sanctuary of North Warrenton Baptist Church, Kasey reflected on his trip to Russia and his concern for the fledgling Christians he met there.

“They have a boldness and zeal about their faith and the call to discipleship,” Kasey said. “When they talk about denying themselves, taking up the cross, and following Jesus, they know what it means. And they’re willing to bear it, even in the face of persecution.”

“Most of (those we met) think if things could go like they’re going for 10 years, maybe capitalism would work. But they also think in the next election, the government will revert back to Communism. The contender for (President Boris) Yeltsin’s job is a hard-line Communist. They don’t look for (the election results) to be good.”

Among those trying to start churches in outlying villages is a pastor whose faith led to a 17-year prison sentence. For his son, it was four years. But both are enthusiastically making the most of the freedom now afforded Christians in the new republic.

In discussion groups with young converts, Kasey fielded questions about doctrinal issues, and despite their visitors’ protests, the Russian Christians considered Kasey and his team to be authorities. A people long accustomed to authority in their secular lives, they look for the same authority in their faith, Kasey says. They also wanted to know how he managed to minister to a church of 100 people.

Teaching, preaching, and discussing theology with Russians through an interpreter added a challenge to Kasey’s mission. “You have to talk in shorter, more succinct statements...But more than that, you want illustrations to make sense in their culture, so I couldn’t talk about cars I have owned or fast food or the freedom we have in making decisions.”

The young people—teenagers and young adults—are “much more serious about life.” Not glum, Kasey explains, but serious. Career choices, for instance, are very limited. “The government provides the education, the training, but once you decide, you have to stick with it.” In matters of faith, they feel an urgency that sends them out at two in the morning to put up fliers in apartment buildings to publicize Bible study sessions.

Theirs is a fervor Kasey sometimes wishes he could ignite here at home. “We have so much. The Bible says from those to whom much is given, much is required. We have a responsibility.”

Kasey perceives one aspect of the responsibility as tangible—the responsibility to help fellow Christians financially. “If we could send $100 a month to Russia, if we could find the right person to distribute the funds, we could pay a pastor and sponsor a church.” And have money left over, Kasey declares.

Inflation in Russia is spiraling. Kasey bought about $35 or 100,000 rubles worth of souvenirs before leaving and his translator commented on how much he had spent—more than a professor would make in a month.

The gifts North Warrenton Church gathered for Kasey to distribute—money, food, and practical, everyday items—were enthusiastically received. The team depleted their supply of Bibles early on. “We ran out, which is sad,” Kasey said, “but we’re sending more.” Kasey hopes Bibles will be just the beginning.

Kasey’s trip was financed by his church, by a benefactor in Greensboro, and by a church he previously served—a concerted effort, he believes, to sow the seeds of faith.

“And to keep the doors open.”
GRASSROOTS FAITH—These Christians of Lipetsk were one of several groups Warrenton pastor Brent Kasey met with during his mission trip to Russia. The groups are taking advantage of the opportunity to gather with minimal fear of retribution by government forces.

IN STYLE—Brent Kasey looked the part after he donned the traditional Russian fur hat while in the former Soviet Union. He holds one of the most familiar forms of Russian folk art, the nesting doll, fashioned with the face of Russian President Boris Yeltsin.