



Photo of Mikhail and Olga Murga is taken from <https://esd.adventist.org/2014/01/17/nekrolog-5-yanvarya-2014-g-pochil-v-gospode-pastor-murga-mihail-mihaylovich/> Accessed May 23, 2019.

Murga, Mikhail Mikhailovich (1942–2014) and Olga (Vladimirovna) (1947–2011)

DMITRY O. YUNAK

Dmitry O. Yunak graduated in Finance and Economics from a Soviet secular educational institution and completed a six-year course of Theology at an underground SDA Theological Institute (Moldova, USSR). In the Soviet times, he served as a pastor, administrator, and bible/history professor in the underground Theological Institute. In 1990, he was appointed as Treasurer and Publishing Ministries Director for the USSR Division. After the Euro-Asia Division was organized in 1991, Dmitry O. Yunak served as ESD auditor and under treasurer. He was the author of a dozen of SDA history books and scores of other publications. He owns a major SDA history archive.

Mikhail Mikhailovich and Olga Vladimirovna Murga were prominent figures in the Adventist movement in Russia and the Ukraine.

Early Years

Mikhail Mikhailovich Murga¹ was born into the family of Mikhail Ivanovich and Vasilisa Nikolaevna Murga on December 5, 1942, in Neresnitsa village, Tyachev District, Transcarpathia. Neresnitsa was one of the most beautiful places of ancient Carpathia, located near two mountain rivers—Luzhanka and Teresva (now in Slovakia)—and it historically belonged to Subcarpathian Rus' (now Transcarpathian Region, Ukraine). Young Mikhail was brought up in a peasant family. His parents were common people, pious, and sincere Orthodox believers. During difficult post-war times, after the occupation of Transcarpathia by Soviet troops in the autumn of 1944, his mother worked as an accountant at a collective farm and his father (who had worked before the war at a trade enterprise) worked at a local primary school. Mikhail spent his childhood and school time at Neresnitsa.

Conversion

Mikhail Murga developed a meaningful understanding of God when he joined a construction team and left for Kazakhstan to earn money. In Kazakhstan he met Julius Schmidt, an Adventist pastor. In the summer 1962, at the age of 20, Murga was baptized and joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Then in September 1962 he was called up for military service. The service in the armed forces of the Soviet Union turned out to be the strongest emotional and physical stress in Mikhail's life. At that time there was no such thing as alternative civilian service. One had either to implicitly observe the army regulations and serve on a par with others or, given the peculiar features of the Adventist faith (Sabbath observance, consumption of clean foods), counter the existing system. After three months of military service, the military tribunal sentenced Murga, who was convicted of the refusal to take up arms, swear the military oath, and work on Saturdays, to five years of imprisonment in the penal colony of a strict regime. Having served a full term of five years in inhumane conditions, Mikhail walked free as a weathered warrior of Christ.

Early Ministry

After emerging from the penal colony in 1968, Murga was called by the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists to serve in the Tselinograd district in northern Kazakhstan, under the guidance of an Estonian pastor, Villi Nõmmik. This pastor had a wide spiritual experience and strong knowledge of the Bible; thus, he exercised a healthy influence upon the spiritual formation of Murga as an Adventist pastor. During his travels to the city of Novosibirsk, Murga met his future wife, Olga Vladimirovna Zhukova, who had moved from Tajikistan and was actively involved in church ministry. Murga married Olga Vladimirovna Zhukova in Novosibirsk in 1970 and continued his ministry in that city. In 1972 the couple had a daughter, Tatyana, and in 1973 a son, Viktor.

Olga Vladimirovna was born June 21, 1947, in Tajikistan. In 1968 at the invitation of the Seventh-day Adventist church leaders in Siberia, she moved to the city of Novosibirsk to help with the gospel work. After her marriage to Mikhail Murga in 1970, Olga continued to actively serve the church.²

Ordination

In June 1972 Murga was ordained as a pastor. During the ordination ceremony pastors P. A. Matsanov, M. S. Zozulin, and N. M. Ignatov officiated. In 1975 the council of the Siberian Conference sent Murga to serve in West Russia, in the city of Oryol (Orel), where there were no Adventists at the time. As the years passed, the number of Adventists increased and there was need to construct a chapel. The construction activities incurred displeasure from the local authorities. They searched the houses of some Adventists, confiscated all Adventist books, and suspended the construction.

Arkhangelsk

In 1978, after having planted an Adventist church in Oryol, Murga and his family moved to the city of Arkhangelsk, where there was only one Adventist who lived on the nearby island of Chub-Navalok. In addition, Murga knew the addresses of two people who resided in Arkhangelsk and had been in touch with the Adventist message. One of them was a son of a well-known Adventist leader, Grigoriy A. Grigoryev, and the other was a former church member. However, G. A. Grigoryev's son, who was a member of the Union of Artists of the USSR, showed no interest in spiritual matters. A couple of months later a local newspaper published a notice of his death. The second person was Eduard Konrad, a former Adventist, who had served 25 years in Stalin camps. Konrad was terrified. Despite all the efforts made by Murga and the strong Adventist connection of his sons who lived in the United States, he hesitated to demonstrate his affiliation with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He also died a short time afterwards.

One day Murga, who was responsible for the church in the northwest of Russia, received a letter from Pastor Viktor Teppone who wrote about another male believer living in the Komi ASSR and searching for Adventists. He was an ethnic Zyrian³ named Vitalyi Nikandrovich, from the small settlement, Bogorodsk, that could be reached only by plane. After correspondence between him and Murga, Vitalyi Nikandrovich arrived in Arkhangelsk and

was baptized.⁴ Later Vitalyi's wife and other six relatives were baptized.

The four years of Murga's ministry in Arkhangelsk were difficult, especially as he tried to maintain cordial relationships with local authorities who were reluctant to give him permission to start an Adventist church. On June 4, 1981, on the way from Arkhangelsk to Moscow, his youngest son, Mikhail, was born.

Administrative Ministry

In 1982 Murga returned to the city of Oryol where he received, for the first time, an official certificate as a Seventh-day Adventist pastor. The construction of an Adventist chapel began near the city center. Beginning June 7, 1985, Murga served as secretary-treasurer of the Central Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. On November 4, 1987, he was appointed as secretary of the Russian Council of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The 1990 General Conference Session held in Indianapolis, USA, voted to organize a division in the territory of the Soviet Union. Given that M. P. Kulakov was elected president of the new division, the position of the Russian Union president became vacant. In September 1990 the delegates to the session of the Russian Union that was held in Moscow, elected Murga as the union president. Two years later, in 1992, he was elected division vice-president with responsibility for external affairs and the activities of the Religious Liberty department. In September 1993 Mikhail Murga was invited to participate in the work of the 5th session of the Ukrainian Union Conference and was elected union president while his wife Olga served as the union Family Ministries director.

In 1995 Olga conducted her first evangelistic campaign in the Donetsk Region and proved to be a talented evangelist. In the 15 subsequent years, she conducted 72 evangelistic programs. In August 1998 Murga became the Ukrainian Union Conference executive secretary and Public Affairs and Religious Liberty director. Between 2000 and 2004, Murga and Olga carried out missionary activities in Israel, by invitation of the Trans-European Division.

Later Years

In 2005, when Murga returned from Israel, he continued his pastoral ministry in Ukraine in the cities of Mukachevo and Uzhgorod and then in Russia in the town of Mtsensk. He continued to pastor until the summer of 2012. In 2008 he had a heart attack and had a serious cardiac surgery, but returned to his ministry. On May 1, 2011, Olga Murga died in Mtsensk.

In 2012 Mikhail Murga moved to Brovary, near Kiev, Ukraine. On December 13, 2013, he had Ischaemia (an inadequate flow of blood to the heart) and never recovered. On January 5, 2014, Mikhail Murga died.

Contribution

Mikhail and Olga Murga were prominent figures in the Adventist movement in Russia and the Ukraine. As an administrator, Mikhail Murga served the church during one of the most severe crises faced by the Adventist church in the former USSR, and he made a strong contribution to the development of the church. His wife, Olga, who assisted him a great deal, was an astute evangelist who delivered sermons that captured the attention of thousands of people in Ukraine and other countries. Through her ministry, hundreds of men and women became Adventists.

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NOTES

1. “Obituary: On January 5, 2014, Pastor Murga Mikhail Mikhailovich Rested in the Lord,” accessed July 20, 2018, <https://esd.adventist.org/2014/01/17/nekrolog-5-yanvary-a-2014-g-pochil-v-gospode-pastor-murga-mihail-mihaylovich/>
2. “Evangelist Murga Olga Went to the Lord,” Protestant.ru, accessed May 23, 2019, <https://www.protestant.ru/news/prosecution/ofchristians/article/68066>.
3. From the Komi-Zyrian ethnic group in the Komi Republic and some other parts of Russia.
4. He told Murga an unusual story of his conversion. In the 1920s he happened to hear the Seventh-day Adventist message and purchased some Adventist books from an unknown person. The trying times came when Vitalyi, who was still non-Adventist, suffered for his faith in Christ. On false charges, he was sentenced to be shot. But he escaped and attributes his escape to a miracle by God many times.

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