



Central Prayer House in St. Petersburg, 1999.

Photo courtesy of D.O. Yunak.

West Russian Union Conference

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In the early days of Adventism in Russia, the entire territory of the Russian Empire was a part of the East European Mission Field, and in 1903 it was incorporated into the German Union Conference. In 1907 the Russian Union Conference, was organized as a separate entity. In 1913 the Russian Union Conference was divided into the East Russian Union Conference, which included regions of central Russia; and the West Russian Union Conference (??????-???????? ???? ????), which included the western regions of the Russian

Empire, with the exception of Finland.

Territory and Statistics

Territory of West Russian Union Conference: Portions of the Russian Federation west of the Ural Mountains; comprising the Central, Moscow, Northwestern, Southern, Ural, Volga, and Volgo-Vyatskaya Conferences.

Statistics as of June 30, 2017: churches 384; membership 28,453; population 95,017,298.¹

Historically, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the European part of Russia has had various types of administrative organization. In the early days of Adventism in Russia, the entire territory of the Russian Empire was a part of the East European Mission Field, and in 1903 it was incorporated into the German Union Conference. In 1907 the Russian Union Conference (RUC), was organized as a separate entity. Beginning January 1, 1908, RUC included three local conferences (Baltic, Caucasus, and Southern) and three mission fields (West Russian, East Russian, and Central Russian, the last approximately comprising the territory of the present-day WRUC). In 1913 the Russian Union Conference was divided into the East Russian Union Conference, which included regions of central Russia; and the West Russian Union Conference, which included the western regions of the Russian Empire, with the exception of Finland.

In 1920, due to the inability of the Adventist Church in Soviet Russia to maintain working relations with the European Division, the fourth All-Russian Session of Seventh-day Adventists decided to establish a new division-like organization that would comprise the entire Russian territory. The result was the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists. In the *SDA Yearbook* that organization was called "The All-Russian Federation of Societies of Seventh-day Adventists"² and it included the West Russian Union (territory of the present-day WRUC), North Russian Union, Caspian Union, East Russian Union, South Russian Union, and Siberian Union.³

At the fifth session of the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists (ACSDA) that was held in 1924, the above-mentioned organization was renamed as the "All-Union Federative Union of Seventh-day Adventists," and the number of unions (renamed as regional unions) was reduced. The reorganized unions were Eastern, Northern, Siberian, and Ukrainian Regional Unions. The Eastern and Northern Regional Unions partially covered the territory of the present-day WRUC.⁴

The sixth session of ACSDA (1928) saw another reorganization of this church entity aiming to consolidate the regional unions. As a result, four regional unions were organized: North-Eastern Union Conference with the center in Moscow (today the territory of that union lies within WRUC boundaries), the All-Siberian Union with the center in Novosibirsk, the All-Ukrainian Union with the center in Kiev, and South-Eastern Union with the center in Rostov-on-Don. In the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* the ACSDA was called, beginning in 1929, "The Federation (Division) of Seventh-day Adventists in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" without division into unions.⁵

Between 1952 and 1970, the *SDA Yearbook* identified the church in the USSR as “The USSR Division: Federation of Seventh-day Adventists in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,” without dividing into unions due to the inability to obtain information on how the denominational work was organized in the Soviet Union.⁶ From 1971 to 1986, the church in the USSR was officially called in the *SDA Yearbook* “The Congregations of Seventh-day Adventists in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,” without dividing the territory into unions.⁷ From 1986 to 1990, the church in the USSR was called “The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,” which was divided into two associations⁸ and several districts.

At the 1990 General Conference Session, the USSR Division was organized; it included the Russian Union Conference comprising the entire territory of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic). In 1992 the USSR Division was renamed as the Euro-Asia Division, which also included the Russian Union Conference.

The West Russian Union Conference (WRUC) of Seventh-day Adventists was established on July 4, 1994, as a result of the reorganization of the Russian Union Conference that was divided into the East Russian Union Mission and the West Russian Union Conference.⁹ In 2001 the territory of North Caucasus was separated from WRUC to become a new church organization called Caucasus Union Mission. Today, WRUC comprises the territory of European Russia that lies to the east of the Ural Mountains which separate the European part of Russia from the Asian part of Russia, and it stretches in the south to the borders of Rostov Region, Stavropol Territory, and the Republic of Kalmykia.

From the early days of SDA missionary work in the European part of Russia, the church membership changed significantly. After organizing the Russian Union Conference in 1908, the Central Russian Mission Field that was located in the territory of the present-day WRUC, included 256 members.¹⁰

In 1930 there were 136 churches with 2,865 members in the North-Eastern Union Conference (European part of Russia).¹¹ In the early 1930s, the church organization in the USSR practically ceased to exist and the connection with the world Church was broken.

After the USSR ceased to exist in 1991, there were 135 churches with 7,748 members in the European part of Russia.¹² The next few years in Russia were marked by rapid membership growth. In 1994, when the West Russian Union Conference was organized, there were 185 churches with 29,903 members in European Russia.¹³ After the organization and separation of the Caucasus Union Mission in 2001, WRUC had 399 churches with 36,190 members.¹⁴

As of January 1, 2018, there were 28,453 members in WRUC.¹⁵

Organizational History

The Adventist message first circulated in the southern regions of the Russian Empire, mostly in areas densely populated by ethnic Germans. German settlers belonged to various Protestant movements and maintained

relations with their relatives abroad from where they received Adventist books and magazines.¹⁶ Within the first ten years of its existence, the Russian Mission Field was a part of the German Union. Although the Russian government did not interfere with the life of national communities at that time, it endeavored to ensure that their religious influence did not go beyond those communities.¹⁷ For this reason, the influence of the Adventist message on the indigenous population in the first decades of the history of Adventism in Russia was very weak.

The missionary work was organized by the German Union, and all ordained preachers were Germans who hailed from German settlements, could hardly speak Russian, and were not familiar with the Russian culture, history, or mentality. It was only in 1908 that K. S. Shamkov, a Russian graduate from Friedensau Adventist University, was ordained to the gospel ministry.¹⁸

By 1905, German and Russian communities conducted worship in different languages, belonged to different mission fields, and had different preachers.

After the events of the First Russian Revolution, the ban on conversion from Orthodoxy to other confessions was lifted. Consequently, the Adventist Church was recognized by the Russian government in 1906.¹⁹ These political changes opened up new opportunities, and the Adventist message came to the European part of Russia from the southern outskirts and spread among the indigenous Orthodox population.

In 1907, due to the development of missionary work, the Russian Union Conference was organized to unite all Adventist communities in Russia regardless of their ethnic composition or language in which the worship was held.

After the February Revolution of 1917, the Russian Provisional Government pursued a new religious policy aimed at the abolition of religious restrictions.²⁰

Following the February Revolution, the October Revolution took place in October 1917, with the Bolsheviks coming to power, and one of the first decrees of the Soviet government was the Decree on Separation of Church from State and School from Church, which brought hope that the policy of freedom of conscience would be continued.²¹

In March 1934, G. I. Loeb sack, the ACSDA chair, was arrested and went missing like most of his ACSDA colleagues. That was actual liquidation of the SDA organization in the Soviet Union.²²

After the end of World War II, Soviet authorities renewed registration of religious communities and gave their consent to reestablish the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists that was, however, closed again in 1960.²³ Between 1960 and 1981, there was no unified SDA leadership in the Soviet Union; and the Church in European Russia, as well as in other parts of the Soviet Union, operated under the direction of several centers. By the time of unification of the SDA Church in the USSR, there were two independent church organizations in European Russia: the organization unofficially led by P. A. Matsanov,²⁴ and the Republican Council of Seventh-day Adventists in the RSFSR, which was registered with the authorities in 1977 and headed by M. P. Kulakov.²⁵

Despite the difficulties of this period, new congregations appeared in the cities of the European part of Russia and by the time of the reestablishment of the unified church organization there were 115 churches with 6,406 members in the RSFSR.

In June 1981, all Adventist communities in the USSR were united into one organization recognized by both General Conference and Soviet authorities. Such a unification took place with the communities belonged to the organization headed by P. A. Matsanov being merged in the Republican Council of Seventh-day Adventists in the RSFSR, headed by M. P. Kulakov.²⁶ At the 1990 General Conference Session, the USSR Division was organized, with the Russian Union, comprising the entire territory of the RSFSR, being a member of this division.

At the 1990 General Conference Session, the delegates (including 35 delegates from the USSR) voted for the establishment of the USSR Division. Pastor M. P. Kulakov became president of this new organization.²⁷

In September 1990, a session of the Russian Union Conference was held with the participation of 116 delegates who represented 135 churches with 8,064 members in RSFSR. At that time the Russian Union Conference included Siberia-Far Eastern, Volga-Ural, Central, and North Caucasus Conferences. Pastor Mikhail M. Murga was elected president of the Russian Union Conference.²⁸

In 1994 the Russian Union was reorganized into West Russian Union Conference (WRUC) and East Russian Union Mission (ERUM). The delegates to the WRUC session held in July of that year elected Vasiliy D. Stolyar as the WRUC president. The West Russian Union Conference comprised eight local conferences located in the western part of Russia—from the Kaliningrad Region to Urals.

At that time the formation of the church organization took place. Church departments, such as Sabbath School/Personal Ministries, Youth Ministries, Literature Evangelism, Family Ministries, Women's Ministries, Communication, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty, and Ministerial Association, were established. Various missionary programs were prepared and held. Large-scale evangelistic programs were conducted by both foreign (Mark Finley, John Carter, etc.) and Russian preachers (M. I. Ostrovsky, D. D. Reband, V. S. Butov). At the end of 1995, there were 283 churches with more than 32,000 members in WRUC.

WRUC Institutions

In 1991 the Tula Gymnasium was founded. It was the first Adventist secondary school in Russia. In 1999 this school obtained state accreditation. In 1993 an Adventist secondary school was also opened in Zaoksky.²⁹

In July 1991, the Voice of Hope Media Center (VOHMC) was founded in the city of Tula. The VOHMC programs have been transmitted through *Radio Rossii* and *Radio-1* broadcasting stations. Since 1994, a 3ABN branch has been working in the city of Nizhny Novgorod to produce socially-oriented TV programs. Some of the 3ABN programs received the awards of international TV competitions such as *Ukraine United* and *TEFI Region*.³⁰

Since 2014, 24/7 TV and Internet broadcasting, in partnership with *Nadezhda* TV Channel, has operated. Dozens of cable operators in Russia are transmitting TV programs produced by the SDA Church. There are a number of Adventist print media in WRUC, including the magazines *Teper Vremya Blagodatnoe* (*Now is the Time of God's Favor*), *Adventistskiy Vestnik* (*Adventist Review*), *Marfa i Maria* (*Martha and Mary*), and *Chudesnye Stranichki* (*The Marvelous Pages*), and newspapers *Sokrytoe Sokrovishche* (*The Hidden Treasure*), *Vashi Kluchi k Zdoroviyu* (*Your Keys to Health*), and *7D Format*.

Church-State Relations

Because Moscow, the capital of Russia, lies in the WRUC territory, it was WRUC administration that initially took the initiative in structuring relations with Russia's central authorities. The WRUC Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department (PARL) is doing much in developing good relations with federal and regional Russian authorities and in solving the problems that may arise. This area of work is extremely important considering the hostile attitude of authorities towards believers generally and Adventists specifically during the Soviet period and the fact that Adventists are small in number and relatively unknown to Russian citizens.

In 1995 the WRUC president Vasiliy D. Stolyar became a member of the Advisory Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations under the president of the Russian Federation, thus representing the SDA Church, and he also started to work on the State Duma's Public Organizations Committee which is involved in analyzing the proposed laws relating to activities of religious associations in Russia, and on the Committee for Relations with Religious Associations affiliated with Russia's government.³¹

The WRUC PARL Department makes an important contribution to interconfessional dialogue. The SDA Church in Russia is a member of the Christian Interconfessional Advisory Committee (CIAC), which brings together the representatives of Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant communities from post-Soviet countries.

Since 2003 the WRUC president and the WRUC PARL Director have participated actively in organizing and holding a National Prayer Breakfast. This yearly event is visited by representatives of all government departments and well-known public and religious figures in the Russian Federation.

A major contribution to the development of positive relationships with the state was made by Oleg Goncharov who served as a WRUC PARL director over a long period of time. In 2011 he was appointed PARL director for Euro-Asia Division. It was his idea to establish the Russian Religious Liberty Association (RRLA), a non-governmental organization that unites the representatives of Russia's traditional religious communities with the aim of defending religious freedom and harmonizing interconfessional relations. Oleg Goncharov became the RRLA Secretary General, and in 2017 he was elected a member of the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation and a member of the Advisory Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations under the president of the Russian Federation.

During the existence of the Adventist Church in Russia, this organization has been recognized by the authorities, strengthened its structure, and significantly increased the number of members, although it still remains relatively small and little known to the general public. Against the background of the stabilization of the economic and political situation in the country, the numerical growth of the Adventist Church in Russia came to a stop. Today, in the context of escalating political confrontation between Russia and the Western countries, Protestant churches can no longer exert the influence that they did in the 1990s. The indigenous population of Russia is traditionally suspicious of foreigners and any form of Western influence. In this regard, the Adventist Church in Russia needs to rethink its social status in order to take a more active social position and have a deeper understanding of people's interests and needs in order to fulfill its mission.

Executive Officers Chronology

Presidents: M. M. Murga (1990-1993); R. R. Link (1993-1994); V. D. Stolyar (1994-2010); I. V. Krasilnikov (2010-2016); I. I. Velgosha (2016-present).

Appendix: Summary of the History of the SDA Church in St. Petersburg

Author: N. S. Smagin

The first Adventist congregation of 17 members was organized in St. Petersburg by Elder L. R. Conradi and literature evangelist Gerhard Perk in 1897. It was ten years after the first SDA congregation in Russia had been organized in Crimea. The worship services were conducted in the house of Otto Wildgrube, at 53 Kronverksky Avenue, during the years 1897 to 1907.

By 1901 there were two organized companies: the Russian one of 20 members and the German one of 50 members. This was the time when Adventists were outlawed and gathered illegally in private apartments. Also in 1901 the North Union of Churches was formed with D. P. Gaede as president and O. Wildgrube as secretary. Two sisters from St. Petersburg, E. Bartels and S. K. Bojanus, were sent to Friedensau, Germany, to serve as Russian language teachers for a term of six years (1902-1908).

In 1903, J. J. Wilson and his family brought the Adventist message to the German colony of Kamenka in the vicinity of St. Petersburg. Margarita Pletzer was the first to accept the truth.

On October 28, 1904, the first meeting of the North Russian Field was held at the Yakotintsevo farm with H. J. Loeb sack as the chair. K. S. Shamkov was appointed as the field secretary and sent to serve in St. Petersburg.

The Stolypin Reform of 1905 brought official recognition of Adventists by the state. This made it possible to open the first prayer house in St. Petersburg in 1907. Below is the text of the official document sent to the governor of

St. Petersburg:

Ministry of Internal Affairs

Department of Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Confessions

November 6, 1906, No. 5532

Mr Governor:

By the highest approved opinion of the State Council of March 28, 1879 it is granted the sect of Baptists to practice their doctrine, to conduct public services in their own houses or those set aside for them according to the permission of the governors. The registration of marriages, births and deaths of Baptists shall be incumbent upon local civilian governments....

Now, by the decree of March 14, 1906, No. 2783, the governing Senate clarified that the teachings of Adventists seem to be similar to the teachings of Baptists and can be considered as a variety of the latter. Given that Baptists are permitted to freely practice their creed under Art. 1.106 of the Statute of Foreign Confessions, then there are no sufficient grounds for refusing the same to Adventists.

In view of this and in order to eliminate the uncertainty in the religious position of Adventists, who have about 3,000 adherents in Russia, I consider it necessary to clarify that the Adventist sect is subject to all the rules established for Baptists (Article 1.106, 1.108 of the Statute of Foreign Confessions) with the obligation of civil authorities to register marriages, births and deaths of Adventists ...

Minister of Internal Affairs

P. A. Stolypin

Archival data points to the fact that Adventism increased greatly and began to spread during the years of the Stolypin reforms. The volunteer missionary F. F. Geneschke was actively working in St. Petersburg. It was through him that S. S. Efimov and I. A. Lvov adopted Adventism and later became ordained ministers.

In 1907 the first prayer house was opened behind the Narva Gate at 14 Paper Street. According to the annual report, the St. Petersburg SDA church had 88 members by the end of the year.

In 1908, according to archival records, retired Colonel Beyningen conducted a series of lectures in both Russian and German "On the Second Coming of Christ" in St. Petersburg at 40 Kazanskaya Street. He himself was not an Adventist, but as an honest and objective researcher of biblical truth, he competently set forth biblical prophecies.

In 1909, for the first time, a Russian delegation attended the General Conference session.

In 1910 the Adventists acquired a prayer house on the Petrograd side at 17 Bolshoy Avenue. At that time there were 93 church members in the city, and all the communities of St. Petersburg and the St. Petersburg governorate totaled 140 members. Brethren O. Wildgrube, A. I. Lvov, and S. S. Efimov served as ministers. The government began to pay special attention to the SDA movement. Russia's Ministry of Internal Affairs sent their representatives to Adventist constituency meetings.

In 1911 the Department of Russian Spiritual Literature "Efimov and Company" was opened in St. Petersburg, but the scope of opportunities for denominational work started to shrink.

In 1912 the Neva Conference was organized with Daniel Isaak as the conference president. At this time church worship was conducted in three places and a youth department was formed. Brother V. M. Teppone was sent to Newbold College, England, as the first student from Russia. By that time there were 145 church members in St. Petersburg.

In 1913 publication of the *Blagaya Vest'* (*Good News*) magazine started in the city with brother I. A. Lvov as editor. The church headquarters was established. There were three ministers pastoring churches in St. Petersburg, two sisters working as medical assistants, and four literature evangelists. Membership in St. Petersburg reached 136.

On January 1, 1914, the West Russian Union Conference organized, uniting 66 local churches which had a total of 2,134 members.

In 1914, after the beginning of World War I, international and internal tensions led to sharp restrictions and persecutions. A Russian group of students returned home from Friedensau, Germany, together with their teacher, V. M. Teppone, who had shortly before moved to Friedensau after graduating from Newbold College. Some church leaders (Lashko, U. V. Zadokhin, and F. T. Grigorevskiy) were arrested. The regular Sabbath meetings were attended by police officers who intervened in the order of worship.

In 1915, Ellen G. White's book *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings* was published in St. Petersburg. Many Adventists were in prison. Restrictions on conducting worship services made it impossible to use a prayer house, and the church members gathered in the apartment of Pastor J. J. Wilson in Ozerki.

In 1916, Pastor J. J. Wilson was transferred to the city of Rostov-on-Don, and A. Eglitt took responsibility for the ministry in St. Petersburg.

In 1917, after the October Revolution, all the brethren who had survived in prisons returned to their families. Brother Efimov returned to Petrograd (a new name given to St. Petersburg after the beginning of World War I) from exile. Pastor J. J. Wilson again moved to that city. At the beginning of June, the third session of the SDA church in Russia took place. Elder H. J. Loeb sack was appointed president for the West Russian Union Conference. At the same time, the delegates to the constituency meeting of the Neva Conference (June 14-18, 1917) elected Elder J. J. Wilson as conference president.

In 1918, V. I. Lenin issued a Decree on Separation of Church from State and a Decree on the Freedom of Conscience. S. S. Efimov and J. J. Wilson approached the Soviet government about prayer houses. They were permitted to meet with V. I. Lenin. As the result of that visit, three houses of prayer were opened in the city of Petrograd and one in the suburban village of Kamenka. Furthermore, they were allowed to again use the premises at 17 Bolshoy Avenue, where brother A. Eglitt was pastoring a church.

In 1920, J. J. Wilson was transferred to Tomsk; S. S. Efimow to Khar'kov; and A. Eglitt to Odessa. The vacant places were filled by G. J. Gorelik and J. K. Reimer. Delegates from all local churches to the All-Russian Session approved

the Bylaws of the All-Russian Federation of Societies of Seventh-day Adventists (other name: All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists, or ACSDA).

In 1922 the second prayer house located on Zhukovsky street was opened with Brother Anderson as pastor.

In 1925 the North Russian Union Conference of the SDA Church included Neva, Upper Volga, the Northwest Conferences, and the White Sea Field. L. L. Wojtkiewicz was elected union president. The union office was located in Leningrad (new name for Petrograd beginning January 1924) at 34 Bolshaya Pushkarskaya Street. The North Russian Union Conference session was held in the building of the former Lutheran St. Michael church. At the closing session a choir of young church members performed. The first Leningrad congregation held its worship services in the same building. Another congregation occupied the building of a small Mariinsky Lutheran church.

In 1926, 26,000 copies of the Bible in Russian were printed in Leningrad as a result of a joint venture of the Adventist and Baptist churches. At that time there were six congregations in the city, and new churches were opened in the towns and villages of the Leningrad region, namely Kovalevo, Shuvalovo, Novaya Derevnya, and Na Peskakh. On the initiative of V. M. Teppone, an attempt was made to organize courses for Bible workers, but that project was not permitted by authorities. Therefore, the young brethren were sent to different congregations for field study and professional growth. One of those young men was N. M. Arefiev, who was sent to the Nizhny Novgorod church.

In 1927, a General Conference representative, G. W. Schubert, visited Leningrad churches. On June 8 to 12, the third session of the North Russian Union Conference took place in Leningrad. At this session, F. A. Gladkov and A. M. Serkov from Leningrad were ordained to pastoral ministry. Total membership of the North Russian Union Conference reached 996. The evening sessions were attended by choirs of the three Leningrad churches. Some reports of this session pointed to appreciable changes in the attitude of the state toward church activities. N. M. Arefiev was an evangelist when he arrived from Nizhny Novgorod to Leningrad as a delegate to the session. Brother Volodin was elected as local church elder in the first Leningrad congregation. The session also decided to send N. M. Arefiev to lead the second Leningrad congregation.

In 1928 the so-called "Atheist Societies" or "Militant Atheists" were organized throughout the USSR. A magazine with the same name, *The Militant Atheist*, began to appear. At the same time the government ordered the close of the Adventist Publishing House and two local churches in Leningrad.

In 1929 special measures were taken by the Soviet government to restrain the activities of religious organizations. A. M. Demidov, a pastor of the Leningrad church, remembers: "Externally regulated measures to eliminate Adventist activities began in the autumn of 1927, intensified in 1929, passed through 1934, and ended mostly in 1937..."³²

In 1930 V. M. Teppone and N. M. Arefiev were arrested and exiled to Arkhangelsk region. Five local churches in the city were closed down and only one survived.

In 1933 V. M. Teppone and N. M. Arefiev were released and returned to Leningrad to serve in a congregation that gathered for worship in a Lutheran church building not far from the Vitebsk Railway Station on Zagorodny Avenue. V. M. Teppone became the pastor of that congregation.

In 1938 all leaders of the Leningrad church, including V. M. Teppone, N. M. Arefiev, G. V. Kichaev, F. M. Katykhov, P. L. Tapunova, and Adam Pletzer, were arrested on the night of January 28-29. On April 9, 1938, they were shot and their bodies were thrown into the Levashovo Wasteland mass graves. The families were informed that they had been allegedly exiled to the Far Eastern camps without the right to correspondence. The family members were exiled from Leningrad to different regions of the country.

In February 1938, the Leningrad church was deprived of official registration. Church members were forced to worship in homes. The doors of the prayer house were closed for people, but the Adventists knew that the doors of the Heavenly Sanctuary are always open for anyone who believes in the great Savior Jesus Christ.

In 1941 the disasters of World War II came. On September 8, 1941, the 900-day siege of Leningrad began. Adventist nurses, mother and daughter Maximov, took care of the wounded. Other church members, together with S. I. Kolesov, worked on construction of defensive targets and defused fire bombs that hit the buildings. It was the time of severe hunger and many a man didn't live to see the end of the war.

In 1945, after the victory in World War II, the surviving brethren began to petition the city administration for official registration of the church in Leningrad. Brother Petrov, who on behalf of the church board applied for registration, was arrested and exiled to the city of Makhachkala. He stayed there for three years. When he returned to Leningrad he was denied residency and ultimately had to leave the city.

In 1946, inasmuch as there were no local ordained pastors, Pastors A. G. Gallajev and P. G. Silman from Moscow, Pastor Halang from Tallinn, as well as ministers from other places, visited Leningrad to conduct a communion service. Sister Evdokia Mikhailovna Artemyeva went to Moscow with a petition for congregation registration, but she was refused. After repeated petitions, A. G. Gallajev was imprisoned for two years just because he had applied for registration. Later the government officials said that the registration could be possible only if the church owned its own building.

In 1955, A. I. Kholodkov greatly facilitated the acquisition of a prayer house. The building was purchased in the area of Ligovo, but its registration was refused for artificial reasons. Again, the attitude towards believers in the country was becoming worse, and the administrative pressure and interference in the internal affairs of the Church was felt.

In 1957, by a decision of the All-Russian Federation of Societies of Seventh-day Adventists (ACSDA), a Bible worker named Viktor Vladimirovich Teppone was sent to Leningrad. He got a job as a welder, because it was illegal to be without official state employment. He then received a document on the rehabilitation of his father, Vladimir Mikhailovich Teppone. He was put on the waiting list for living accommodations in the Sestroretsky

district of the city of Leningrad. V. V. Teppone sold a church-owned house in Ligovo and bought another house at 7 Lenskaya Street. There he lived temporarily with his family in anticipation of the promised housing. The Kolesov family and their children shared the same house. This building was recognized as suitable for public meetings, so the church applied for registration again. For a long time there was no answer. Having notified N. M. Vasiliev, the Commissioner for Religious Affairs, church members began to use the building for Sabbath worship. But a year and a half later they were refused registration.

In 1960 church representatives went to Moscow to meet with Nikita Khrushchev and ask for permission to worship in their prayer house, but after their visit the prayer house was confiscated. The families of Teppone and Kolesov were evicted from the house, including their small children and all their belongings. V. V. Teppone was removed from the housing queue. After World War II about 20 separate applications were filed for registration of the Leningrad SDA congregation.

On October 5, 1960, the ACSDA was discontinued under pressure from state authorities. For the next ten years, worship services were performed illegally in small groups in private apartments or, in the summertime, at cemeteries. The Church consistently asked for clarification from the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR, but the answer was always that religious societies should be registered regardless of the availability of premises and Adventists in Leningrad had every reason to be registered. The Council for Religious Affairs repeatedly said it would reconsider the decision of the Leningrad City Executive Committee, because the reasons for refusal did not comply with the Regulations on the Registration of Religious Societies.

In 1967 the Leningrad church gathered for worship in the village of Pella in the house of Brother Vorobey, and later on Pontonnaya street in the house of Brother Furlet.

In 1971, finally, G. S. Zharinov, the authorized representative of the Council for Religious Affairs, announced that the Leningrad church was permitted to conduct worship services behind the scenes. Therefore, our brethren rented a hall in a private house at 23 B Third Line Street, Kolomäki, Leningrad, where the church worshiped for the next 18 years.

In 1978 the Leningrad church was visited by Pastor Robert Pearson, president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and Pastor Alf Lohne, GC vice-president.

In 1980, V. V. Teppone was transferred to Moscow, and O. N. Arefiev, an ordained minister, was sent to Leningrad. Elder K. F. Tomenko was appointed as associate pastor. The church raised the registration issue again.

In 1981 Pastor Neal Wilson, the new GC president, visited Leningrad. The same year the authorities agreed to the registration of the SDA church in Leningrad.

On January 6, 1982, the congregation was registered and Pastor O. N. Arefiev received the official certificate acknowledging that he is a clergyman of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. From 1938 to 1982, the Adventist congregation had operated in the city illegally. At the time of registration, there were 76 church members in Leningrad.

In 1983 the Leningrad church appointed a special commission for the acquisition of a prayer house, headed by Sister Lina Ivanovna Leontyeva. They provided local authorities with a list of city buildings that could be used for worship, but the city administration delayed a decision.

At the invitation of Kirill, the Metropolitan of Leningrad and Novgorod, Adventists participated in a series of interfaith meetings with students of the Nevsky Russian Orthodox Theological Seminary. This provided an excellent opportunity to introduce the Adventist message to students and leading Russian Orthodox clergymen of northwest Russia. From 1984 to 1998, representatives of the Leningrad congregation were members of the City Interfaith Council.

On December 23, 1985, the executive committee of the Leningrad City Council granted the church permission for the free use of an old building for worship. It was located in Krasnoselskiy district of Leningrad at 7 Internatsionalnaya Street.

In 1986 plans were made for the renovation of the church building and submitted to the office of the chief architect of the city of Leningrad for approval.

In April 1987 the renovation project was approved and construction work started. The building was demolished and new walls were erected. By the end of the year, the skeleton of new building was completed. All necessary communications were installed. On May 15 all paperwork for the title transfer was completed. Since that time the building has officially belonged "to the religious society of Seventh-day Adventists for worship purposes."⁵³

In 1988 the Leningrad church, in collaboration with the Social Security Department of Krasnoselskiy District, began implementing humanitarian projects for the city. They opened three soup kitchens to feed disadvantaged fellow citizens.

On April 30, 1989, the church moved to the new building. On May 6 the first divine service was held on the second floor, since the prayer hall was not yet ready.

On June 2, 1990, a solemn dedication of the new church building at 7 Internatsionalnaya Street took place. Perestroika in the USSR opened up opportunities for Adventist social services for sick and disabled people. In February 1990, young Adventists conducted a concert of spiritual music in the Palace of Culture of the city of Pikalevo, Leningrad region. As a result, the director of a large plant allocated two apartments for prayer purposes and they have since been used for worship by the Pikalevo church. Pastor O. N. Arefiev was invited to teach spiritual classes for students in grades 9-11 of school No. 95. The congregation started a prison ministry. Due to cooperation with the Leningrad Christian Churches Association, participation in the first interfaith

evangelistic crusade with Lutheran Pastor Kalevi Lehtinen in the municipal Sports and Concert Complex resulted in the baptism of 44 people.

On March 11, 1991, a charity event led by Brother V. T. Manilich in the city of Vyborg opened the way for Bible studies and resulted in the baptism of 12 people. In October, an evangelistic campaign by Brother Onni Rutkonen was held there. The youth from the Leningrad church, under the leadership of V. T. Manilich, actively participated in the event. As a result, 196 people were baptized and a new congregation was established. For the first few years, the church worshipped in a rented auditorium of the municipal Palace of Culture, but on January 14, 1995, there was a rededication of the church building. This was an old prayer house built in 1930s by Finnish Adventists. Later the city officials gave it to a naval base, and now it was returned to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Meanwhile, Leningrad returned its historical name St. Petersburg. In the same year, Pastor Bruce Johnston conducted an evangelistic campaign in St. Petersburg. A total of 323 people were baptized and the second Adventist congregation in the city was organized. Local Adventist congregations began active welfare evangelism by serving the homeless and the disabled. This ministry resulted in the baptism of several disabled people in the city of Gatchina, Leningrad region.

In 1992 an evangelistic campaign by Duane Mackay resulted in the baptism of 400 people. The third Adventist congregation in St. Petersburg was organized. In total, the number of church members in the city numbered near 1,000.

In 1993 representatives of the SDA Church became members of the Research and Methodological Council on Religion Studies of the All-Russian Society *Znanie* (The Knowledge).

In 1994 the SDA Church received a plot of land at 85 Torez Avenue for constructing a new house of worship. The construction work was carried out under the supervision of Alexander Romanov.

On November 8, 1997, a solemn dedication of the second church building took place in St. Petersburg. It was the year of the centenary celebration of the SDA Church in St. Petersburg. An evangelistic campaign held by John Carter and Vadim Butov resulted in the baptism of 812 people. The fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh Adventist congregations were organized in St. Petersburg.

On February 12, 1999, the Russian branch of the International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA) established the IRLA North-West Office. The foundation meeting of this new organization took place in St. Petersburg on September 14. Many religious and political leaders, public officers, and municipal deputies became members of the IRLA North-West Office. Pastor O. N. Arefiev was elected the Executive Secretary of the IRLA North-West Office. This organization conducted a number of international conferences where the participants raised their voices in defense of the freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, and freedom to disseminate religious beliefs.

In June 2001 a soup kitchen was opened at 85B Torez Avenue to feed needy citizens. Since then about 40 people have received a free hot lunch every day.

In 2003 the Source of Life Publishing House (SOLPH) participated in the selling exhibition of religious literature during the celebration of the 300th anniversary of the city of St. Petersburg.

In 2010 an evangelistic campaign with the participation of Peter M. Kulakov was held in the Shelgunov Palace of Culture. The church obtained permission for a long-term lease of that facility.

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