

RUSSIA

Sakha Christians Crave Literature

David Cameron and Marilyn Kay Henry (henry99707@yahoo.com), missionaries stationed in Yakutsk, Yakutia, Russia, describe their publishing work in this Siberian region.



The homeland of the Sakha, sometimes called the Yakut, is in the vast northern Republic of Yakutia in the Russian far east. The capital, Yakutsk, is located due north of North Korea.

The Sakha, numbering more than 400,000, are the dominant people group in Yakutia. God threw open the door to evangelism and the public preaching of the gospel in the early 1990s. Today there are more than 300 evangelical Sakha believers; all new Christians since the fall of Communism.

The emerging Sakha Church craves more Christian literature and media. Sakha believers receive some literature in Russian, but this is not their heart language. Also,



Young people at the 2002 Christian Yakut conference.

many who live outside the capital, have limited ability in speaking and understanding Russian.

Older Sakha Christian literature includes the four gospels on extra large pages dating from the end of the 19th century. It was written in an archaic orthography, before the Russian government and linguists modernized the alphabet in the 1930s.

The first modern Christian publication was the illustrated *Life of Jesus* in 1994. This Cook publication has been translated into many languages. InterAct Ministries, an American mission, partnered with a Russian mission, Gospel to the East, to sponsor 50,000 copies for every Sakha home.

A Sakha professional translator worked on the

text. A pastor tediously copied the Sakha translation by hand in preparation for printing.

This allowed the longer Sakha translation to fit into the characters' speech balloons. The pastor was assisted on the project by a beautiful Sakha woman; they fell in love while working together and married.

The large galley sheets were sent to Japan for mass printing along with other similar projects. The books were sent in a container by ship to Russia, then by railroad to the southern region of Yakutia, and finally by truck to Yakutsk.

In 1995, the Institute for Bible Translation produced a high quality Bible storybook with full-page illustrations. Since then, they have also published three preliminary Sakha translations for distribution and review: the *Gospel of Mark*; the *Gospel of Luke and Acts*; and the *Gospel and Epistles of John and James*. They plan to print the *Sakha New Testament* in 2003.

Scripture Gift Mission in England has also helped meet the need for literature for the Sakha by producing two illustrated booklets: *Jesus Christ Has*

Power to Save Us and *The Teachings of Jesus Christ*. They are compilations of appropriate Scripture portions from the Gospels.

There is movement in the direction of writing original literature in Sakha. A young Sakha pastor drafted an original tract for unbelievers. The tract asks basic questions about everyday life to help people think and to give them a hunger to know God.

Seven years of devoted work by 22 gifted Sakha musicians—with the Lord's help—have produced the first hymnal, *Praise to God*, with 120 Sakha songs. The hymnal—with the national flower, beautiful Sakha lilies, on the cover—was launched at the Fourth Annual Sakha Christian Conference, held in Yakutsk in March 2002. Copies of the hymnal were received from the publisher one day before the conference began.

The hymnal was a grassroots project, started when Sakha people came to the Lord. They began singing Russian hymns and translating them into

Sakha. These translated songs served as the bridge to original Sakha songs. Several people have composed songs blending beautiful Sakha music and poetry. More than 10 percent of the songs in the hymnal are original. Eight new Sakha hymns have already been composed since the hymnal was printed. Several audiocassettes using these hymns have been distributed.

Various Sakha people have also been involved in all phases of making two Scripture calendars for 2002. They chose to highlight the dates for Christmas and Easter, but not June 21, a national celebration to the sun and nature, which is a public holiday in Yakutia.

The large calendar cites Matthew 4:4 where Jesus said, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." The picture shows a Sakha barn with several piles of hay, representing the basic diet of milk, milk products and beef. Many families have one or more cows which stay inside most of the winter as they contend with -40° or -50° weather.

The pocket-size calendar cites John 4:14 where Jesus said, "But whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." The picture shows a calm lake with a canoe setting in the grass on the edge. A lake represents pure water, which

you can scoop up in your hand and drink.

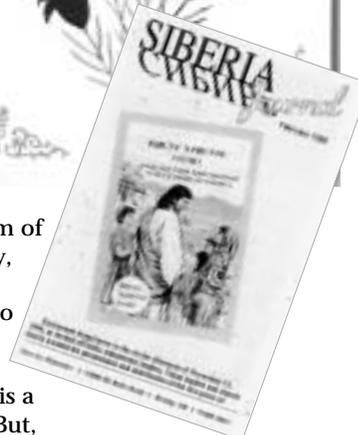
Sakha believers have created bookmarks, posters and souvenirs.

One current project is a booklet of 20 testimonies written by Sakha believers that will encourage Christians and also be useful in evangelism.

Another project, in the initial stages, is the translation of teaching materials from Bible Visuals. Spiritually mature Sakha believers critique every item for biblical accuracy and literary correctness. Trial editions have shown that this is extremely important before any formal printing takes place. In 2000, a Sakha Christian Literature Committee was formed to help insure this.

Traditionally, believers in the West have provided Christian literature free of charge. These outside sources are giving less since Russia has been "opened up" to the gospel. This form of funding, unfortunately, has made the Russian and Sakha churches too dependent on other believers for their own Christian literature. It is a hard cycle to change. But,

as the Sakha Church grows and believers crave more literature, there is hope for more indigenous writing and publishing. ❖



International PUBLISHING EVENTS

November 30-December 15, 2002
Guadalajara International Book Fair
Guadalajara, Mexico
www.fil.com.mx

January 23-February 7, 2003
Cairo International Book Fair
Cairo, Egypt
www.cibf.org

January 29-February 1, 2003
Christian Booksellers Association
Expo, Indianapolis, IN USA
www.cbaonline.org

February 8-11, 2003
National Religious Broadcasters Convention, Nashville, TN USA
www.nrb.org

February 11-16, 2003
Taipei International Book Exhibition
Taipei, Taiwan
www.tibe.com

March 6-8, 2003
London Book Fair
London, United Kingdom
www.libf.co.uk

March 9-20, 2003
"Financial Administration," International Christian Publishing Institute, Cook Communications Mins. Intl. Colorado Springs, CO USA
www.ccmi.org

March 13-14, 2003
Evangelical Christian Publishers Association Christian Editors Conference
Colorado Springs, CO USA
www.ecpa.org

March 21-26, 2003
Salon du Livre: Paris Book Fair
Paris, France
www.ebook-europe.com

March 27-April 7, 2003
Bangkok International Book Fair
Bangkok, Thailand
pubat@inet.co.th

April 2-5, 2003
Bologna Children's Book Fair
Bologna, Italy
www.bookfair.bolognafiere.it