

DAY
6

DIASPORA

*God's impact
among the diaspora*

Immanuel Baptist Church mission trip to New York City. This Arkansas church sits a couple miles from the Southern Arkansas University campus. As the church reached out to college students and professors, they began to feel a call for the nations. They ended up adopting two diaspora groups - mandarin speakers and Uzbeks - based on this interaction. IMB Photo



Bibles lay open amid the food wrappers on the fast-food restaurant table. The two men sat quietly discussing a key concept in Christianity — Jesus rising from the dead.

"WHAT? NO WAY!" the college student from Uzbekistan exclaimed and grabbed one of the Bibles. "Did he fly or something?"

Ben Coulter, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in Magnolia, Arkansas, stifled a chuckle and explained Jesus' resurrection. The excitement on Alex Pokusaev's face showed he understood. The next Sunday, the Southern Arkansas University international student chose to follow Jesus.

The decision was not made on a whim. Alex spent months asking Ben and anyone else at the church question after question. He explained that as an international student 7,000 miles away from home, he was curious about everything. It was all new.

"I didn't grow up with any beliefs," Alex said, noting that he was baptized in the Russian Orthodox church by his father while his mother was a nominal Muslim.

Most at Immanuel Baptist Church had never heard of Uzbekistan. As the college student shared about his homeland, members of the congregation began to love Uzbeks. Fewer than 1% in his home country claim Jesus as their Savior. Their hearts broke as Alex asked, "What happens to those who have never heard of Jesus?"

That question spurred the church to action. They committed to working with Uzbeks in Arkansas. The Arkansas Baptist

State Convention works in conjunction with the International Mission Board and the North American Mission Board to reach diaspora people groups within the United States. Diaspora means the movement, migration, settlement or scattering of people away from their indigenous homeland. Immanuel Baptist Church strategically engaged diaspora groups by reaching out to internationals in their community.

But, they wanted more. They sent a team to New York where more than 100,000 Uzbeks live.

"God gave us a heart for Uzbekistan. Alex had been in the United States for multiple years. No one ever sat down and explained the gospel to him before coming here," Ben said. "Our church realized God was bringing unreached people groups to us...not just Arkansas but the United States."

As the Arkansans came out of the New York subway and surfaced on the streets of Brighton Beach for the first time, they didn't hear much English. The smells from food stalls and restaurants were unfamiliar. It was international missions without leaving the U.S.

"What started out as reaching an Uzbek student in our backyard, turned into a burden for an entire nation," Ben said. "How many Uzbeks don't know Jesus rose from the dead? We need to do something about it."

Thank God for Southern Baptists' desire to reach the nations coming to the U.S. Ask God how you can respond to the need to reach the diaspora in your community with the gospel. Pray for Alex and his spiritual growth so that many more can know the truth of Jesus.



The college Sunday school class is where the love of internationals began for Immanuel Baptist Church, Magnolia, Arkansas. International students visited the church and got involved. From there, church members learned about their cultures, beliefs, families and needs. Hearts opened to the possibilities of reaching the world through the connections in this class. Every Sunday, students pray for the nations marked on the map where current and former students call home. IMB Photo