



Central Asia

mission initiative

Long a crossroads for East and West trade and historically part of the Silk Road, Central Asia stretches from China, west to the Caspian Sea, and from Afghanistan, south to Russia. Countries that lie within the area include Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, all former Soviet Republics.

Part of the Eastern Russia and Central Asia Provision Annual Conference and under the jurisdiction of the Eurasia Episcopal Area, the Central Asia District of the United Methodist Church spans a region of political, cultural, and ethnic differences. There are large populations of ethnic Koreans, Russians, and Ukrainians, and the churches in the area are young and growing. Consequently, the bishop of Eurasia has called for the development of leaders and youth ministry. The district also participated in the development of the Roadmap to 2015, a comprehensive plan for church development and self-sufficiency that originated within the Russia Initiative.

Global Ministries started the Central Asia Mission Initiative in 2003, and by 2006, two mission centers had been established, one in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and the other in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. In 2011, the Center for Church Leadership was established to help train local lay and clergy leaders.

Challenges: The complex, often-oppressive political environment is one of the greatest challenges faced by the church, and while several United Methodist churches have been officially registered as legal entities in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the church is not registered as a denomination. In some countries of the region, the church has to act as a nongovernmental organization (NGO) in its role as an agent for social and economic change, and the spiritual outreach is through word of mouth. The geographical breadth

of the region encompasses broad cultural and ethnic diversities, as well as cultures deeply rooted in Islam.

Assets: Like the Christian church in the first century, the drive for ministry by local leaders is truly inspirational and courageous. Three missionaries and three Nationals in Mission provide outstanding support for leadership development and training, and spiritual outreach.

Goals: The Mission Initiative is committed to helping the churches in Central Asia with continued growth, to progress towards self-sufficiency and, ultimately, in becoming a Provisional Annual Conference. This will require sustained advancements in all five areas of the Roadmap to 2015: quality in ministry, education, self-sufficiency, mission and evangelism, and social outreach.

At the Central Asia Roundtable held in March 2013, key goals for the year were determined. They include supporting the Center for Church Leadership in Almaty to educate pastors and lay leaders, providing assistance with youth ministry, including support for the 2013 Evangelization Youth Camp, and building Covenant and In Mission Together partnerships with new churches in the United States.

Statistics: In Central Asia, there are 11 churches, an additional five faith communities, and 11 pastors.

In Mission Together Coordinator:

Mi Rhang Baek
mirhangg@gmail.com

Regional Executive:

Üllas Tankler
utankler@umcmision.org

Assigned Bishop:

Bishop Eduard Kheday