



Cohort to Russia:

- Melody Allen
- Amy Cappiccie
- Jeni Gamble
- Jennifer Jewell
- Carolee Kamlager
- Bertha Mucherera
- Elaine Wright

Led by:

Prof. Tom & Judy Lawson

Inside this issue:

Culture & Social Work Education	1
Religion & Social Work Education	2,8
Personal Thoughts	3
Immigration & Pension Fund	4
Children's Services	5
Social Services for Youth & Disabled	6,8
Reflections	7

International Social Work ~ A Russian Journey ~

Volume I

Fall 2005

Feeling at Home on Foreign Soil: Cultural Commonalities

By Elaine Wright

From the 24th of August to the 6th of September of 2005, seven doctoral students had the privilege and pleasure of participating in the first Kent School student exchange to Russia. Developed and facilitated under the expert and experienced guidance of the Director of International Programs, Dr. Tom Lawson and his wife Judy Lawson, this recent excursion is one of the many exciting opportunities provided by the Kent School to enable its students to expand their global consciousness and critically examine the nuances of the social work profession around the world.

As a cultural immersion, students are exposed from day one to the foreign values and penchants of their host country. Tours of historical cities, sacred cathedrals, rolling countryside, and even forest glens shared and shaped impressions of the re-

nowned Russian landscape. Multiple course meals with ritual toasts of endearment warmed hearts and abundantly satisfied all appetites.

Coinciding visits to old age homes and orphanages of youth created visual contrasts as students were exposed to the needs of vulnerable citizens and the community response to diverse client populations. Lectures on social work topics challenged assumptions about the profession in the two countries and engendered dialogue about mutual concerns for the past, present, and future.

In regards to a comparison of the American and Russian cultures, the commonalities began to stand out as the differences subsided. The students, in the end, were impacted by this educational experience which made them feel at home on foreign land and inspired by the initiatives of their new-found friends.



Kent Cohort with Russian hosts. From left to right (above), Carolee, Leonid Dyatchenko, Jeni, Bertha, Tom, Marina Dyatchenko, Melody, Elaine, Jennifer, Andrey Peressypkin, Judy, and Amy.



Dr. Lawson speaks during BSU's opening ceremonies.

Social Work Education: Lessons from Russia

By Jeni Gamble

Belgorod State University (BSU), a progressive and aggressively growing educational institution founded in 1876, was the gracious host for our trip to the beautiful 'Black Soil' region of Russia. After participating in the opening ceremony for BSU's Fall term, Kent School students

were provided with social work lectures and Russian language courses, customary cuisine, traditional music and dance, and tours of the university's botanical gardens and astronomy observatory.

In the United States, it might be surprising to find the theology and social work faculty housed and operating with the

same facility. However, the teachers and students at BSU have found a complimentary partnership with these two human-serving disciplines. The social work program, established in 1995, has 408 students evenly split between full-time and part-time programs of study.

Previously providing a post

Continued on Page 2



Melody ponders the state of religion at a church in Prokhorovka.



“It is not the brains that matter most, but that which guides them – the character, the heart, generous qualities, progressive ideas.”

Fyodor Dostoyevsky



Belgorod State University

Russia, Religion, and Social Work: A Paradox?

By Melody Allen

Visions of painted copulas and golden domes rising regally against blue skies and white clouds were the images that crowded my mind upon first learning that I had the opportunity to travel to Russia. At the time, I knew very little about the Russian Orthodox religion, its impact on the Russian people, or even the profession of social work in Russia.

The Past Status

The Russian religion traces its roots to the Baptism of Kiev in 988. Prince Vladimir I adopted for the Russian state the religion of the Byzantine Empire. Since 988 the religion has grown so that it now includes over 90% of ethnic Russians. In the last 1000 years the church has faced persecution

from many parties and has only experienced religious freedom since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Cathedrals, monasteries, convents and other religious properties were then returned to the Church.

“It is no longer a secret that the thorough eradication of religious life in Soviet Russia was intended to convert the traditionally religious Russian society into an atheistic *tabula rosa*: the social equivalent of a patch of bulldozed ground on which the high-rise building of socialism could be erected” - www.utoronto.ca/crees/news/apr03/filator.htm.

Conflicts between Church and State have existed throughout the entire history of the Russian Orthodox Church. A crop failure in 1921 led the Soviet government to demand that church valuables be given

to aid the starving population. A fateful conflict erupted between the Church and the new authorities, deciding to use this situation to demolish the Church to the end, led to an almost complete destruction of the Church structure by the beginning of WWII.

During this time, most clergy were imprisoned in concentration camps where many perished or hid in catacombs. Thousands of priests also chose to change their occupation.

The catastrophic course of combat in the beginning of WWII forced Stalin to mobilize all the national resources for defense, including the Russian Orthodox Church as the people’s moral force. Thousands of churches and monasteries were then reopened and bishops were released from prison

Continued on Page 8

Social Work Education continued from Page 1

high school, Specialist certification in social work, the school has recently expanded the educational opportunities for their students and community to include a multi-level education system with Specialist, Bachelor’s, Master’s and Post-Graduate courses of study. Additionally, BSU has most recently begun offering a Distance Learning Program for social work students.

Comparable to the social work standards set by CSWE, BSU’s social work programs are based on the standards set by the Belgorod region’s accrediting body. The coursework includes human, social and economic forces, outreach sciences, specialized courses and specializations, national and international social work models, theory, family relationships,

gerontology, and agency practice placement.

Current research being conducted by students and faculty examines high-risk populations, healthy social environments, tolerance and inter-ethnic conflicts, client-focused solutions, and process optimization. Faculty research also focuses on international volunteerism, gerontology, vulnerable and unstable families, cultural communication, youth programming, and social work education.

Similarities between social work in Russia and the United States can be found easily and need little explanation. The social work students in Russia, not unlike American university students, feel the call for social work and a need to help people. While social worker positions

are in high demand in the Belgorod region and country, BSU’s graduating students can expect to find positions that warm their hearts and challenge their minds if not overflow their wallets.

Overwhelmingly, the social work program at Belgorod State University shows incredible potential and a unique perspective for helping professionals.

Any Kent School student interested in learning more about BSU and their programming can visit the university website at www.bsu.edu.ru.

There are great opportunities for partnership and research with our new colleagues in Russia. More importantly, the friendships and experiences gained from international social work exchanges become the real lessons in life and work.

Traveling the Roads ~ Personal Thoughts about Russia

By Carolee Kamlager

We spent many hours in the bus traveling the connecting roads, large and small, of region to region, Moscow to Kursk, to Orel to Belgorod; town to town, Moscow to Chekhov, to Orel to Belgorod to Prokhorovka to Krasivo to Kupino to Kholky and to Stary Oskol. Those roads carry the vision of people, old, young, men, women, families with small children, little girls in their first day of school dresses with large white bows in their hair; all walking the roads and fields. Every space is a space for walking.

There are people waiting on the side of the patched up, bumpy, unlined 'highways' for buses. They ride in red curtain lined windowed old buses, going home to work in their small garden plots. I see men, women, children and dogs riding together in wooden horse drawn wagons carrying cords of wood in preparation for the winter. Cows and goats tethered to ropes, in grass so close to the road that one could touch them, as they eat their circle of grass. Ducks and geese picking through the leftovers and chickens are finding even more edibles from their remains. These animals are part of the common ground not bound by fences.

Folk know that fall is approaching. Families, in their garden plots rake up summer's discards and set aside the pumpkins and squash for winter's meals. The orange is brilliant against the dark earth. Strikingly, the plots are seldom next to the individual cottages. Rather, the majestic blue cottages, several at a time, set along the road, most with a painted fence, giving them privacy from the passing world. However, the world remains alert to their conversations on the ubiquitous small bench facing the road. This talking bench, shared by all ages, is frequently occupied by women in flowered scarves gathering strength for the next labor and men seemingly full of stories of past struggling days, no one is rushed.

This spatial configuration of house, fence, bench and plot represent common Russia. The ever present blue, I am told, was not always ever present, but rather post-Soviet. Its humble but striking brilliance naturally connects with the sky reaching beyond the man made road. The intricately but simply carved roof trim repeats the natural curves of nature. The house is the natural connection to the motherland.

The fence provides the message of individuality. One cannot see what's behind the fence; one is safe from the eyes of the road. The fence does not represent fear; there is no barbed wire, no glass spikes on the fence top, only the wooden pickets declaring that "this is my sanctuary".

The bench connects persons, either on a personal level of neighbor to neighbor, or observer to the road traveler. The bench holds the key to many important life decisions.



Carolee enjoys cooking in a traditional Russian oven.

The garden plot interfaces the individual and the collective worlds. The plots lay side by side, few with fences declaring personal space. Persons labor hard in the individual plots. There is no mechanical equipment, only hand tools.

There is a collective yet individual rhythm.

It is here that I understood Russia's passion for itself.



A view from the roadside of a woman selling apples, garlic, and honey.

"Scratch a Russian,
and you'll find
a peasant."
Milla Jovovich

"To seize
and put into words,
to describe directly
the life of humanity
or even of a single
nation appears
impossible"
Leo Tolstoy in
War and Peace



A farmhouse as seen from the roadside.

People in Transition: Immigration and Emigration in Russia

By Amy Cappiccie

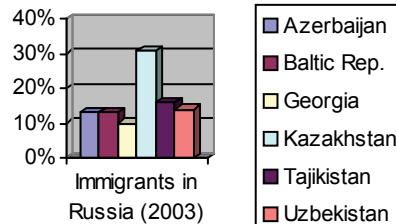
Russia has noted an increase in emigration since 1990 with a liberal political regimes' connection to the West during its Perestroika period (Shevtsova, 1992). As increased numbers left the country, Russia began in 1991 to examine its immigration policy with the borders officially opening in 1993 after the fall of communism (Brubaker, 1995).

Two distinct groups exited Russia: 1) families reuniting with ethnic homelands (i.e. Germans) and 2) ethnic groups of previous discrimination reuniting (i.e. Jews). Approximately 1.1 million Russians have migrated from the country since 2002 (Ruehl, World Bank Online). Leaving the southern and western cities as the most populated, internal losses have come mostly from the north and east areas noting from 10% to 60% loss of residents.

Though emigration levels have not reached expected levels, mass immigration concerns prompted border countries such as Poland and Romania to implement policies reducing the flow of Rus-

sians into Western Europe (Shevtsova, 1992).

Due to the unequal numbers entering and exiting certain parts of Russia, the government instituted a regional resettlement program (Ardittis, 1995). The program encourages new immigrants to inhabit specific regions of the country in order to increase the number of inhabitants in areas that lost many Russian citizens.



Encouragement to move to these areas includes housing and job options. Ruehl (World Bank Online) suggests that success is too early to note and the programs may be unsuccessful due to the uneven employment opportunities across the nation.

As worries of emigration decrease,

Krastnets (2005) reports increases in illegal immigration to larger cities and border areas of Russia. Estimates of 4.5 million undocumented immigrants mostly from China, Vietnam, and Afghanistan cross Russian borders with China, Mongolia, and Kazakhstan. Approximately 69.7% are male; 80% Afghans; average age 34 years; lack work experience from home country; 40% sent money to home country; most from poorest segment of home country; and 79.8% have informal jobs in Russia. Push factors to Russia include home country economics, strife, and armed conflict. Pull factors include ability to make more money and maintain consistent employment (Krastnets, 2005).

Social service provisions are available at both the federal and regional levels including: 1) goods such as food, clothing, shelter; 2) legal aid; 3) employment assistance; 4) adjustment help; 5) information; and 6) psychological support. Russia is also attempting to lower xenophobic reactions to immigrants through "tolerance propaganda" by the media and civic groups and promotion of multicultural activities.



Post-Soviet Pension Fund Plagued with Problems and Protests



By Jennifer Jewell

Established during Soviet times, the Russian pension fund offers retirees cash benefits and some services, such as medicine, transportation, and a housing allowance. Prior to the new system that began in 2002, all citizens received an equal pension that did not take into consideration the salary of the worker. In addition, basic human rights of the citizens were met including employment, housing, healthcare, transportation, and many other needs.

The new system, similar to the United States' Social Security plan, bases the pension amount on the amount paid into the system through employment. Workers are able to retire earlier in Russia with the retirement age for females at 55 years old and 60 years old for males. The Russian pension fund grants three cost of living increases a year, according to a Pension Fund administrator in the Belgorod region.

The pensions are quite low despite cost of living increases. In the Belgorod region, an average pension is equivalent to \$80 (US) per month. Even though the cost of basic needs is considerably low outside of Moscow, many pensioners do not receive the same level of service as under Soviet rule when other needs were provided such as housing and healthcare.

Other services, such as pension homes, are available for the disabled, war veterans, and retirees. Although a small number of pension homes exist for the growing number of people who could benefit from them, these homes provide a solace for pensioners. During a visit to a pension home, residents helped to provide a sense of community by singing traditional folk music together.

As with any system, problems exist. Possibly leading to additional overhauls of the program, a significant issue is the lack of money being paid into the system to support the growing number of pensioners.

With the number of pensioners growing, the amount of workers paying into the system is diminishing as many middle-aged Russians are dying early because of disease, accidents, and alcoholism (Economist, 2003). The number of deaths are also outpacing the number of births (Encarta, 2005). As the strains on the system continue to mount, discussion has turned to solutions ranging from raising the retirement age to privatizing the pension fund.

In early 2005, mass protests were sparked by cutbacks in services offered to retirees, the disabled, and war veterans. A law took effect that pensioners would receive cash benefits rather than free services, such as medicine and transportation. Protesters declared that the cash benefits did not cover the costs of these services. Although some regions reinstated some services, many older Russians are experiencing hardships in meeting these basic needs (Global Action on Aging, 2005).

~Children's Services: Not Just a Song and Dance~

By Bertha Mucherera

The following is an account of visit to two children's homes located beside the Cathedral of Saints/ Apostles Peter and Paul Monastery in the village of Prokhorovka. As our party of nine Americans, flanked by our guides and interpreter, approached the gate leading to the courtyard between two big



houses, we saw a group of children lined up to welcome us. The little boys in their military-styled black uniforms, shiny black shoes, and neatly trimmed hair, and the girls of various ages in pretty dresses and with white bows in their hair, looked so attractive and quiet. The little girls wore rainbow-colored dresses, and the older girls wore teenage mini-skirts and shirts, like children everywhere. The children immediately burst into a welcoming song as soon as our whole group stopped in front of them. As they finished singing, their housemothers, directors of the children's home, said something in Russian, and suddenly the little boys

changed into a rambunctious group of children, rushing towards us and grabbing our hands in a very gentlemanly manner, to lead us into one of the buildings, talking as we went. Unfortunately, we could not understand what they said, but we agreed to be led into the girls' house and to be seated on chairs.

The children had prepared a drama based on an incident which took place a few miles outside of their city at the scene of a World War II battle of Kursk on July 12, 1943. Their play depicted a young peasant boy traveling the countryside because he is orphaned by the war. He came upon a troop of Russian soldiers who tell him to leave the field, but he refuses, stating he wants to be in their army troop. The sergeant finally allows him to stay to fight in the war. In addition to the play, the children performed songs, Russian ballroom dancing, and ballet for us. Afterward, we went into the gymnasium, where the boys and girls did both tumbling and gym tricks. For me, they were tricks, because I cannot perform any at all.



Located side by side, the girls' home caters to girls between the ages of six and sixteen, and the boys' home is for boys between the ages of six and nine. The girls and boys learn many skills from hygiene and health care to care of their rooms and of the younger children; from cooking to education, including reading, writing and subjects like music, dance and gymnastics. The classrooms are located on the same floors as the bedrooms, with three children to a room. The boys' gymnasium was equipped with miniature gym equipment, such as treadmill and bars. My escorts, Ivan and Slavi, showed their skills on these machines and did push-ups with an ease which showed daily practice. The gym teacher stated that they practice for an hour or more daily.



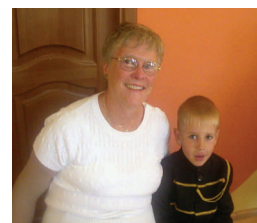
Jeni and youth hosts.

After touring the boys' home, we returned to the girls' home for a tea with the girls. The girls cook for themselves on weekends, and they had baked some tea delicacies for us. The girls that we talked with were very ladylike, and we enjoyed the sharing of this nice tea before we left.



"Own only what you can always carry with you: know languages, know countries, know people. Let your memory be your travel bag."

Alexander Solzhenitsyn



Judy Lawson and youth host.

"For every beauty there is an eye somewhere to see it. For every truth there is an ear somewhere to hear it. For every love there is a heart somewhere to receive it."

Ivan Panin

The Status of Russia's Social Orphans

By Bertha Mucherera



Bertha explores a 14th Century underground monastery.

"If you want to be happy, be."

~

Leo Tolstoy

~

"Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself."

Many children in Russia who are orphaned or removed from their families for any type of abuse or neglect are placed in children's homes or orphanages. Thousands of children in Russia are termed "social orphans" due to abandonment by their parents or by parental rights being taken away.

Since the break-up of the USSR in 1991, the rising number of "social orphans" has made it difficult to take care of children in these orphanages. Some of them house up to 300 children. Russia has been in the news since the Soviet dissolution, in regards to the orphanages and the suffering of the children residing in them. People in the United States have been urged to adopt children from Russia. New laws are being enacted for the safety of children in these homes.

Belgorod Region, in contrast

to other areas, has strived to maintain good programs for their "social orphans". For example, instead of the usual large Russian orphanage homes, the two we visited are known as family children's homes. The boys' home only houses youth between the ages of six and nine. Children younger than six years live in different homes and come to this one when they are six or seven years of age. When they turn ten, they go to a home for older boys. This reduces the number of children in each home. For these two homes, there are less than twenty children residing there at any given time.

The staff in the girls' home are paid by the state/region with the staff of the boys' home paid by private donors. The Federation gives them funds, but the regional government has their own funds to contribute to the homes, viewing the orphans as the future of their region.

These children are able to leave

at age sixteen to go to a university or college which is also regionally funded. They are given scholarships and stipends while at the university. Those who do not go to university or college attend technical colleges to learn trade skills.

Belgorod State University has engineered programs within their school of social work where students volunteer in social organizations or/and acquire class credit (internship). The students volunteer in the orphanages and also at rehabilitation centers for the parents of children who have been removed from their homes.

Parents are given an opportunity to recover custody of their children, but this rarely happens. The children in the homes then are adopted when possible or put in foster homes, released from public care at sixteen, go to college, or out into the world on their own.

Continued on Page 8

Social Care for the Disabled in the Former Soviet Republic

By Carolee Kamlager

Senior Associate Professor of Social Work, Svischeva Irina Konstonovna lectured on the social care of Russians with disabilities. Provided with an excellent handout, the lecture included a historical overview of social care in Russia, with specific focus on modern Russia and care provided in the Belgorod region.

The following is a summary of her lecture.

Russian social care can be divided into four stages:

- IX-XVI Century
- XVII-XIX Century
- 1919-1991
- 1991- present

The ideas about disability and the place of persons with disabilities, or invalids (as these

persons are referred), seemed to mirror not only religious and political influences but economic conditions as well.

In the second stage, Russians witnessed the beginning of a social state and the idea of institutionalization. Persons with disabilities were put away, out of sight from public view.

In the third stage, the idea of employment for people with disabilities began to take shape. Sheltered workshops were developed though people with disabilities remained out of society. What was important at this stage was the idea that persons with disabilities began to have a 'work identity' and therefore became a 'unit of value'.

In the fourth stage, Russia began to see further see the situation take a hegemonic

change from objects of pity (stages 1 and 2) to work units (stage 3) to a medical conditions. Persons with disabilities became further defined by their medical diagnosis, which in turn opened the benefits and economic gates of social security and social care.

At the policy level, social security became dependent on the diagnosis of disability. In 1995 the Social Care of Invalids Law was enacted. In a sense, the USA has the beginning of stage 5. This political climate recognizes a rights base to persons with disability. Disability becomes part of the larger hegemony of democratic rights for everyone. The Law considers not only a medical condition but also one's individual functioning, emphasizing the indi-

Continued on Page 8



WWII Battlefield Memorial



World's largest iron ore mine.

~Afterthoughts and Reflections about Russia~

“Tradition, Friendship, Food, Religion, and Hospitality. These are the words that will forever hold in my memory when I think of Mother Russia. One day, as I was pondering my experience in Russia, I was overwhelmed with the similarities between Russia and Southern culture in the United States. Say the words to yourself (Tradition, Friendship, Food, Religion, and Hospitality). Don’t these conjure up pictures in your mind of the south with our yummy dishes, smiles to strangers, and willingness to open our homes to others? Russia is very much like the South. Perhaps that is why I felt at home. My collage of pictures is truly a kaleidoscope of sights, smells, and feelings associated with the trip. I think I am most thankful for the day we visited a retirement home and an orphanage. Seeing the love and laughter in the eyes of both ends of the age spectrum was truly a heart touching experience. Instead of allowing life circumstances to be a negative impact, these resilient individuals embraced life.” – Amy Cappiccie



Amy gives Inna Kaskova a thank you gift.



“As a four-time participant in the Kent School student international exchange program, I was impressed with the generosity of our hosts and the sincerity of the people we encountered during this trip to Russia. Hoping to return someday, I felt a great affinity for the people, the culture, and the landscape of Russia.” –Elaine Wright

Elaine with pensioner/war veteran.

“From the moment that I set foot on Russian soil at the airport, until the time that I went back through the gate of the airport to depart twelve days later, our hosts greeted us with large smiles. I felt like they were receiving us as kings (or in our case, as eight queens and one king). In my opinion, it was their giving which made all of them special. One thing which reminded me of my home of Zimbabwe was the Russian tradition of offering bread and salt to guests in a home. At the Belgorod University Retreat Home, we were greeted at the gate by the University Rector with loaves of freshly baked bread, to be eaten with salt, and with another type of bread with meat inside. This was a gesture of hospitality to guests. In my mother’s culture, there is a tradition of receiving guests by offering them water, to quench their thirst from a long journey and to welcome them by letting them know that the hosts will share with them whatever they have.” -Bertha Mucherera



Kent Cohort, Lawsons, and Rector at Belgorod University Retreat Home.

“As I walked through Russia, and as I reflect on that journey now, I am astounded by the great strength of a courageous people. Social workers devote their lives to the care of children and the elderly, and work tirelessly to develop a system of care and service that will meet the needs of all Russians. A difficult history has the power to create defeat in its people or generate great strength. I hope that I might have the courage to face adversity with the same strength of character that I saw reflected in the eyes of the Russian people I met. In this day and age inspiration is hard to find and I’ll always be grateful to my Russian colleagues and friends for helping me to remember why I wanted to be a social worker.” – Melody Allen



Jeni and Jennifer enjoy a meal with Roman and Tatyana Spitsin.

“Being in Russia during Hurricane Katrina and a time of national crisis was difficult and stressful, but our hosts and the people we met expressed such concern and compassion for the American people and the tremendous loss and tragedy. We were surrounded by people that only wanted to show their support and help us connect with our loved ones in the states. It really goes to show that the human connection crosses all language, cultural and social boundaries. We were grieving for our loss and the Russian people’s kindness and understanding consoled our hearts.” - Jeni Gamble



Sergei Kolesnikov wears UofL hat.



Point of Contact:
Dr. Tom Lawson
Director, International Programs
Kent School of Social Work
Oppenheimer Hall, Room 102
University of Louisville
Louisville, KY 40292
Phone: 502-852-6922
Fax: 502-852-0422
Email:
tom.lawson@louisville.edu

Editor: Elaine Wright
Photos: Elaine Wright, Jeni Gamble, & www.bsu.edu.ru

Social Orphans

continued from Page 6

All in all, children's services is a new area within Russia's child welfare system. New laws have been enacted to make life easier for children, but there is still much that needs to be accomplished by the country in general.

Care for the Disabled

continued from Page 6

vidual more so than the diagnosis.

Regarding current policy, Svischeva noted that there is a lack of a single strategy for the complex management of dis-

ability. Laws are passed but few are implemented.

There are three types of social insurance: labor pensions, insurance services, and insurance benefits. Military or social pension eligibility depends on the reason or cause of disability. It is further delineated by age, disease type, and cause of disease (ex. result of war). The rate of pension depends on level of disability, which is determined by a doctor with input of a social worker.

Disability services in the Belgorod area operate from a broader ten-year social policy (Jan. 2003-Dec. 2013). Invald care is one of the focus areas. For persons with disabilities this policy covers quality of living issues, including education, rehabilitation, and medical research related to disabilities.

Currently there are efforts to employ persons, including supporting microenterprises. Unemployment for Russian persons with disabilities is twice as high as those without. In the USA, the rate is 70%.

Children, age 3-18, may attend both special and regular education classes. At the secondary level, there are segregated schools available.

There is a self-advocacy movement among persons with disabilities and their families which is rights based. The discrimination of persons with disabilities has spawned this movement and some governmental policy changes in the area of equal access to services. However, there appeared to be an obvious lack of physical accessibility in the Russian communities.

Russia, Religion, and Social Work continued from Page 2

(www.russia-in-us.com/Religion/Christianity/).

Regardless, the Church again faced widespread persecution, under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev.

Mikhail Gorbachev, in the late 1980's, instituted new social and political freedoms which resulted in many cathedrals being returned to the Church and restored by local parishioners. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 also furthered the spiritual progress of the Russian Orthodox Church (www.russia-in-us.com/Religion/Christianity/).

The Present State

Belgorod State University, in the Belgorod region of Russia, has placed Theology and Social Work in the same school. To this American social worker this appears to be an unlikely combination. Social work education has shied away from religion and spiritu-

ality as the nation has continued to stress the separation of Church and State. The social work profession does have a rich history with faith-based institutions, however, and often turns to them to find assistance for clients.

Yet it seems imperative that the Church and the Profession remain separate. Perhaps it is this history and partnership that makes it even more paradoxical that an American social worker should be surprised by the pairing of religion and social work education. Similar combinations in Kentucky have met resistance and conflict.

Russian social workers at Belgorod State University are given the opportunity to explore the importance of religion and spirituality and are given permission to use that knowledge in their practice with clients.

Many American social workers struggle with addressing spiritual conflicts or helping clients navigate religious needs

or crises. Clients who adhere to a religious framework or a spiritual life often report finding resilience and strength from those beliefs.

Perhaps, the combination of social work and theology's most important contribution is a level of comfort and skill to help clients access support, strength, and courage from a religious/spiritual place that clients already lay claim to.

Identifying and accessing client strengths are some of the most important roles of a social worker. The American social work education system may prevent American social workers from understanding the true strength that can be garnered from a religious/spiritual life.

Though the risk of influence or the placement of pressure on clients to accept religious beliefs must be monitored closely, all of its benefits and risks create an interesting buffet of thought for this reflective social worker.