

European Baptist Federation recently started supporting a church planting project in Tajikistan. In the end of the 20th century this nation received the Bible in their language for the first time in the entire history. The Word of God is being distributed and read by the people which eventually results in planting of new churches.



Introduction to Tajikistan

The population of Tajikistan is about 7 mln, including a sizable Uzbek minority (ca. 1 mln). The nation is considered nearly 98% Muslim (Sunni) – majority of them being nominal adherents. Over 90% of the territory of Tajikistan are mountains - some of them being highest in the world outside Nepal. Unlike the other Central Asian countries, the language and culture of Tajikistan is Persian rather than Turkic.

Tajikistan is probably poorest of all the former soviet republics with a GDP per capita of just \$287. 64%

of the population is estimated to live below the official poverty line set by the World Bank of less than \$2,15 per day. Many Tajik men are forced by the economic situation to seek work in Russia and send money home.

Tajikistan declared political independence after the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991. The nation almost immediately fell into a civil war which was tribally based and lasted seven years (1991-97). The war left death and destruction and resulted in ethnic cleansing - about 60 thousand people died. Majority of non-Muslim population particularly Russians, Germans and Jews, fled the country during that time mainly because of persecution and increasing poverty.

Tajik people are still an un-reached by the Gospel ethnic group.

Baptists of Tajikistan

The Baptist work started in Dushanbe, the capital, in 1929 by two Baptist elders and their families who were deported to Tajikistan for their religious faith. They soon became missionaries as they continued preaching the Gospel. The new converts formed a congregation but from 1937 to 1943 the authorities closed the church. After many appeals the government registered the church in 1944.

In 1989 the Dushanbe church had more than 800 members with almost half of them German and with services in both Russian and German. The congregation included

as many as sixteen national groups. In addition to the Dushanbe church the Baptists formed other congregations in the territory.

The Baptist Brotherhood of Tajikistan is comprised currently of 7 self-governing churches and 23 affiliate groups that are scattered all over the country. Br. Alexandr Vervai is the Brotherhood Chairman being one of the few Russian-German Baptists to have stayed and he says that he 'started to rebuild the Union from the scratch in the 1990s'.

Now there is a Baptist community of around 1000 members including an increasing number of ethnic Tajiks. Baptist ministry concentrates in five directions:

Evangelism, mission and church planting. During the past 5 years the number of churches and groups has doubled, and over 500 thousand volumes of Bibles and other spiritual literature in Tajik language have been distributed. The



Baptists also share with other evangelicals in the running of a very well-stocked Christian bookshop right in the main street of Dushanbe.

Ministry in prisons. The door of opportunity has been open and 8 of 11 prisons in the country have organized prayer rooms. Also 2 Christian rehabilitation centers for men and 2 for women have been opened.



Children's ministry. There are many children in Tajikistan (53% of the population). Baptists organize summer camps and Vacation Bible Schools. There is also fruitful work with children in boarding schools.

Discipleship – majority of new converts are people who don't have any Christian background. They can learn about Baptist faith in discipleship courses through extension training.

Extension Bible School was opened recently in cooperation with Romanian and Moldovan Baptists which serves as an effective tool in preparing for ministry. There

are promising young Tajik leaders beginning to emerge who are trying to start new congregations, especially in the villages.

Church planting

Indigenous church planters lead a couple of groups under oversight of the Baptist Church of Dushanbe. One of them finished an Inductive Bible Study course in Bucharest Romania. His goal is to start new Tajik speaking church in Dushanbe. He has organized a church planting team which includes ca. 25 people who meet in 2 subgroups and are members of the existing Baptist Church. The new initiative has full support of the mother church and the new church start will be a separate entity in future. Church planter implements the 'one to one' method of ministry.

Baptists of Tajikistan are also involved in mission work among the mountain people of the Pamirs (on the border with China) and are even praying for an opportunity to send some missionaries to Afghanistan. They are very grateful for prayers and support for their ministry. They appreciate greatly being part of a large Family of Faith - both the European and Global.

In Christ,

Daniel Trusiewicz
EBF Mission Coordinator
www.ebf.org/imp

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To help growing healthy churches!

For the glory of God!

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