



UKRAINIAN MISSION WORK

Quarterly Report
March 2011

Westworth Church of Christ, 5728 White Settlement Road,
Fort Worth, Texas 76114

“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” I Corinthians 15:58

As I sat and visited with Zhenya and his wife, Marina, we talked of old times and of years we had missed spending together. We spoke of when Zhenya was baptized, of the family vacations that we had shared, and how we had both shared personal tragedies and successes. I had been with him at the lowest point of his life, and he had comforted our family during one of ours. I had no idea that God was going to show me his loving, gentle hand through my old friend.

A Bit of Background

I made my first visit to the Soviet Union in 1990, and quickly realized the need to plant the seeds of the Gospel message in that great country.

In those early days of freedom, the people of the Soviet Union were hungry for the truth. Our evangelistic campaigns gave us the opportunity to preach to thousands of people at a time, and we watched with amazement as the light of the Gospel displaced the darkness in the lives of countless people. The Lord blessed our work and used us as we met and comforted a number of the “underground” churches, established numerous congregations, and distributed or helped to distribute almost 1 million copies of the scriptures. Of course, we did not do this alone, but alongside dedicated brothers and sisters from many different places and congregations.

Ukraine Today

The world has changed dramatically since 1990. Ukraine has become a very modern country. The place that was torn apart by rampant inflation is now one of the most expensive and progressive countries in Europe. The same place where our family once had difficulty finding food to buy now has shopping malls and supermarkets that impress everyone who goes there. It was in the light of these drastic changes the Ukrainian Mission Board asked: “Do we need to change the focus of the work?” and “Is it time for us to pull out of this mission field?” To answer these questions, the UMW Board of Directors sent me to Ukraine to talk to some of the churches we helped establish, and to investigate possible new directions for the mission. Honestly, I felt that I already knew the answers to those questions. I was convinced that I would find a new goal for UMW in helping those coming out of the Ukrainian orphanages. I have several friends that are involved with this type of ministry and I would rely heavily for their input, but I felt I already knew that UMW needed to change its mission and goals. I was surprised at what the Lord showed me.

While it is evident that there is a huge need to help the orphans in Ukraine that is not the direction the Lord led me. Every place I turned, I found that our primary goals of evangelism are still as valid today as they were in 1990.

It started in my friend’s home

As I sat and visited with my friend, he began to tell me of some of the things that were happening at the Obolone congregation. This church was one of the very first churches we helped to establish in Kyiv. To this day, it continues to use a communion set that was hand crafted by brother George Gray of Fort Worth, Texas. This congregation was originally known as the School 53 church. It moved to the Obolone region of Kyiv after the police interrupted the Sunday services and told us all we had to leave. For many years Obolone was influenced by a number of different mission groups. It hosted many missionaries from the United States as well as from other countries. For the last several

years however, it has been self-supportive financially as well as in congregational leadership. Zhenya began to tell me a fantastic story of how the Obolone congregation had been transformed. He told me the members realized that everyone there was just alike. They all had about the same background, the same income, and the same type of lifestyle. Through their Bible study, they decided they needed to reach those whom no one else would associate with. While they were having this discussion, a young man came into the building looking for a place to worship. He had been an inmate in a prison about 300 miles away. While in prison, he read a Bible and became a believer. The Obolone church decided to help this man and his mission to save those in that prison.

Zhenya told me that once a month he makes the trip to the prison, meets with the inmates, and has a worship service with them. There are about 40 inmates who attend this prison church every Sunday. Besides this man, there are two more inmates from that prison who are now studying to become preachers.

Zhenya then introduced me to his friend. This man is truly "on fire" for the Lord. When I asked him what it was that persuaded him to become a believer, he said simply "Bog Zhivoy" – "God Lives." He went on to say that in prison he realized that he had lost everything: his family, his friends, his job, and his freedom. But, he realized that God lives, and if he lives then the Bible is true, and it says that God loves us and will never leave us. He realized he hadn't lost everything, but instead he had gained eternity. It was this encounter that made the past 20 years make sense. God, gently showing me that the seeds we planted 20 years ago, are still yielding a harvest.

My next encounter was with Andrew Kelly. Andrew and his wife have a very effective mission. They minister to orphans and children. They operate halfway houses for those coming out of orphanages as well as a very nice camp facility about an hour drive from Kyiv.

Andrew showed me the great need for the work that he was doing with the orphans and foster care in urban areas, but did not know how receptive the small villages would be.

Andrew told me that he had once taken some Bibles into the villages and left them on the doorsteps of the homes. He did not try to preach or even knock on the doors; he just left the Bible on the doorstep. For the next few weeks, dozens of people came to Andrew's house asking if he was going to start a church in their village. They wanted to learn the truths of the bible. Andrew told me that evangelism was not part of his mission and thought UMW should look into working in the villages. I also traveled to the city of Sumy where UMW has been working for many years. Before going to Sumy, I was convinced that this town was unreceptive and that the mission work should reduce its efforts and focus somewhere else. What I found was also surprising. As I stayed

in Sumy, I walked around the town and spoke with the people there. I found many of them very interested in spiritual matters. Many Young families want their children to know about God and a better way of living. I came away from Sumy with the impression that the people are still receptive and that it is still a viable mission point. I also met with the Nivky congregation. This congregation has been very close to my family. This is also the congregation Grady Bryan and his family attend. Many of the members were my students at International Christian University. Of all the churches I've visited in Ukraine, I believe this one has more babies than any other! This congregation has experienced growth through child birth! It also continues to reach out to the community in different ways.

Conclusions and Plans

At the end of my trip I could come to only one conclusion: the original vision and mission of this ministry continues to be one that is viable for Ukraine today. The recommendations that I made to the UMW Board of Directors were very similar to the very first objectives:

1. We should continue to encourage and aid Ukrainian churches who are striving to spread the Gospel.
2. We should work through Ukrainian evangelist to reach the lost in the small villages of Ukraine.
3. We should continue to distribute Bibles to those who need them. UMW still needs your help. With the clarification of objectives, we need more people willing to travel and to teach. We hope to see not only work being done in the villages, but also training sessions conducted for Christians. If you would like to help, please contact us.Tim Johnson

Quarterly Financial Report

October 1 through December 31, 2010

MONTHLY CONTRIBUTIONS \$8,248.00

Expenses:

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|----------------------------|----------|
| Tim Johnson Travel Expense | 5,500.00 |
| Sumy Church | 800.00 |
| Secretary Salary | 1,950.00 |
| Gospel Tidings | 245.00 |
| Can Project | 204.28 |
| Office Supplies & Postage | 1,000.00 |

TOTAL EXPENSES \$9,744.00

CURRENT BALANCE \$83,395.00

CHRISTMAS CAN PROJECT!!

Can money from 46 congregations totals \$13,288.30 to date.