



What difference does it make?

In the age of Zoom, Vimeo, Facebook, wearing of mask and social distancing having become commonplace means of interacting with one another. What has happened? Life suddenly ceased to be “normal”... most planned activities came to a screeching stop. The 2020 Ukraine camp was cancelled due to Covid-19. For only the second time in more than 20 years there was no camp. In 2013, the camp was cancelled due to the Russian proxy invasion of Eastern Ukraine and subsequent fighting in Dzerzhinsk (now Toretsk); this time by a microscopic invader.



More on this photo later in the report

Ukraine has reopened to international traffic albeit with restrictions. The Ministry of Health considers the United States a high-risk country; Americans will be required to go into self-quarantine or take a COVID-19 test upon arrival; test results are made available within 24 hours with self-quarantine protocol in effect until the results are communicated to the Public

Health Center. For Ukraine Missions, in a normal year, the next upcoming event would be the Fall-Character for Kids workshops which are in jeopardy of cancellation as well.

Plans are underway for a 2021 camp. However, I have no personal plans to return until March 2021. So, what about the interim? We continue to pray for the many Christians, friends, and acquaintances in this faraway land, but is that all that can be done? No. With your support, the Kingdom work is moving forward in lieu of being on-site.

News from Chernigov

In December a request came from a congregation which I have visited several times in Chernigov Ukraine. Chernigov is the Capitol city of the region by the same name. It is about a two-hour bus ride from Kyiv. It is bordered on the north by Belarus; now in a state of national protest over election fraud. This small congregation was evicted from their place of worship and subsequently purchased an old house in need of much repair. Walls needed to be repaired, plumbing & heating fixed before the congregation could worship together. Thanks to your generosity sufficient fund were given to purchase new radiators and related repairs. More recently in June, again thanks to your generosity, funds were made to reroof the building.



Old roof



New roof



Old radiators before



New radiators installed

Here is the “Thank You” from Alex.

Dear brothers and sisters in the Hardin Valley Church of Christ,

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Greetings to you from Ukraine!

My name is Alex Zazhytko and I am the pastor of the Chernigov Church of Christ. On behalf of our congregation, I want to express to you deep appreciation for your very generous gift. We used that money to install a new roof in the building that we are converting into a church house.

May our good Lord richly bless you and reward you a hundred-fold for your love and kindness!

Alex



Alex (3rd from left), with his children, mother and father, Wife Tonya (2nd from Rt.)

News from Ivano-Frankivsk

Although camp was absent in Ivano-Frankivsk this summer, your support still made its way to the people in that community. Heavy rain in the Spring produced massive flooding of the Prut River

(flows through the retreat site of Yaremche). Many people were displaced from their homes and struggle to rebuild their lives. Following are two letters from Ivan Skoleba, Minister of Ivano-Frankivsk Church of Christ. The first letter dates from May 2020 and the second from mid-August 2020.

“Hello Brothers and Sisters in Christ! Thank you for your letter. For your kind hearts and assistance to Ukrainian people. We briefly answer your questions. The people we wrote about in our letter are the ones who have turned to us for help in the last few months. When we started working in the village of Zelena, several people approached us. These are the people who come to study the Bible and need both spiritual and material support. Bohdan’s family, where we are going, has a son-in-law named Ivan, his wife Lilya had a disabled child and buried the child not so long ago, and they have two more children. Ivan received severe emotional stress and fell ill. Doctors have prescribed medication and they do not help, he cannot work and fell into severe depression, Lily found a job and does not know how to help her husband, the children are also worried. Due to quarantine, we could not accompany them this time, but we ask everyone to support this family in prayers. Lilya is very exhausted because she has been caring for the disabled daughter for 17 years and now her husband is in such a state.

For another year we have been helping a young girl Freya, who was abandoned by her parents because they have psychological problems. we give food and dormitory payments every month

because Freya is studying at the university, but apart from us she has no support, then there is money left for another month. She needs many things to live. The church also participates and shares what anyone can, we also ask you to pray for this girl. A woman from Ivano-Frankivsk, Olga, turned to us and asked for financial help, because her husband had died and her pension was small, she was about 70 years old. She still has loans. All we could we helped and we pray that she can open her heart to the living God, because she says she reads the Bible. These are the people we pray for and help as much as we can. We are worried about the village of Zelena, because now after Bohdan's baptism we have a group of three families there and we plan to establish a community there. Could your Church support this ministry there? We pray for this as well. With love Ivan and Svetlana. Sincere congratulations from our family."

For background, outreach in the mountain villages has been going on for several years in an attempt to establish a congregation. Zelena, about 35 miles from Ivano-Frankivsk, is a small village further up the Carpathian Mountain from our retreat sight in Yaremche. Of course if you haven't been there it doesn't mean much. If you have been there you know how rustic and beautiful it is. Again, if you haven't been there you must join us on a future mission to experience worship services with our Ukrainian brethren, enjoy fellowship and relax in the beautiful surroundings.



From August, Ivan writes: *Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, thank you for your prayers and help in serving in Ivano Frankovsk. In the photo people are a small Church of Christ, which thanks to your support we were able to organize. We had great joy yesterday at 12.30 in the afternoon we baptized Tatiana and Peter. This husband and wife have three sons in the photo. Thank you very much to everyone who helps in the work in the village Zelena. Thank God for His mercy to us! We love you. Ivan and Svetlana.*





Late Winter photo of building construction in Ivano-Frankivsk in the western region of Ivano-Frankivsk, home to our summer camp, the church building gets closer to completion. Men in the congregation do much of the work.



News from Toretsk

The last Summer Camp in the city of Toretsk (formerly Dzerzhinsk) was in 2013 but the work there has not stopped. Our friend and advocate, Tatiana Mitkalova, has retired from School No.10. Few buildings have escaped the ravages of war and its presence hastened an exodus of families from their homes. The picture (L, I took this photo during an overnight stay in the home of one of our sisters) and another below represent the hard life that exist today... a much harder life than when our Summer Camp was held each Summer...it was hard then! The dilapidated multi-plex (next page) is one in which some of us had spent our nights while there.

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While much has changed, the kingdom efforts of William and Lyuba Wharton have not. The Church continues to meet although the numbers have dwindled because of the war. It survives, as do some families in Toretsk, thanks to the many who support the mission. What follows is from Bill and Lyuba.



Following is a recent letter from the congregation worshipping there.

Dear brothers and sisters, Christians in the Church of Christ in America,

Thank you, dear friends, for your love and care and warmth of your hearts; and for your spiritual and financial support for us. We know there are troubles in your own country, but you still don't forget about us. We have received money and clothes from you, for which we are very grateful. In turn, as believers who are also members of the Family of God, we have

shared these gifts with neighbors who are in need. People we visited, with tears and excitement expressed their gratitude to us and to you.

We want to share one example, a young man named Dmitriy who became disabled 5 years ago. Because of the war he was driving home from work in complete darkness and drove into a crater from a bomb that had fallen on the road. That crash left him paralyzed. After a lengthy hospital stay he was released to live with a relative. At that point he was able to sit in a wheelchair and actually move around, although with great difficulty. Even though he is still deprived physically he is a very encouraging person. As he sees it, God gave him another chance to live. He spreads joy and warmth of his heart to others. We ask you to pray for him. He is now 30 and his disability does not stop him. His hope is evident and he still has his sense of humor. So he asked us to send his words of gratitude to you, dear brothers and sisters.

All our church in Toretsk is praying for all of you. May God bless you as you show love and generosity for people in Ukraine. May God's grace and mercy fill your lives and may God's angels keep you safe in all your ways. We hope one day we will all meet with you, brothers and sisters in Christ.

With love,

Lydia, Tamara, Valentina, Nina, Iryna, Maxim, Zhenya, Liza, Lena, Nadiya, Valya, and other people you have taught and fed and encouraged in Toretsk (Translation by Lyuba Wharton)

During the summer months, the water supply in Toretsk has been interrupted by a collapse of the main aqueduct that serves the city. We have been busy trying to help the Christian widows with fresh water and funds to purchase food and medicines, as well as

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ordering coal for heating this fall. Most of the widows do get a monthly stipend from the government, but the amount is so limited that it doesn't even cover the cost of heating! (We know that talking about heating costs seems so untimely for us, but Ukraine nights will be quite chilly by some time next month! Public schools in Toretsk, much like other cities in the world, have been closed during the pandemic. That changes in a few days as schools are set to reopen.

The enforced distancing has been made even worse by the civil war that has stood as a major obstacle to normalcy. We are rejoicing, however, that there is a "cease-fire" in effect that has resulted in quiet nights for the past three weeks. There is some hope that the guns will be silent even longer.

Bill & Lyuba

This is but a small part of the mission work... again, thanks to you. What will 2021 bring? Only the Lord knows for sure. For Bill and Lyuba, Susan and I pray for and encourage you to continue to support the efforts of Ukraine Missions during an especially unusual year for all.

So, what difference does it make?



Walking along a beach one day, a man saw a boy pick up a starfish and throw it back into the water. "Why did you do that?" asked the man.

"Because the tide is going out, and the starfish would be stranded here and dry out. It would be dead before the

tide comes in again," responded the young boy. "What difference does it make? There are thousands of starfish in the ocean. What difference would it make if you throw just one back in the water so it can live?"

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“It makes a big difference to this one” smiled the boy as he walked on down the beach, looking for another starfish.

What difference does it make if just one family is fed? What difference does it make if just one orphanage is visited? What difference does it make if a winter’s supply of coal is purchased for an aged widow? What difference does it make if just one child, in a group of 150, at Summer Camp wants to know more about the Gospel? What difference does it make when on a cold Winter’s morning a few men, women, and children can meet comfortably in their own building to hear the Word of God? What difference does it make when a wheelchair bound soldier hears a knock on the door?

What difference does it make if we do nothing?

Michael Lawson
Ukraine Missions