

Ukraine Mission 2012

Odessa:

The ROA Team flew into Odessa on Thursday, **May 31** through Vienna. From 4 AM on Wednesday morning when we met at ROA until going to sleep the following evening at 10 PM, the team had been up for over 24 hours (except for a few cat naps on the 3 flights). Some members did not get up the next morning until after 10 a.m. to eat a late breakfast and pack up to depart for Kagarlyk.

When we arrived back at the seminary (**June 16**), we found that the Seminary was having sewer problems and we needed to use the outside toilets (pit with a seat, but a step-up from Kagarlyk and Savran). We also were required to shower outside with sun-warmed water, which was warm, that evening, but cold the next morning.

After breakfast on Sunday **June 17** at the seminary, we drove to the German Lutheran church in downtown Odessa near the city center. The Pastor of this church speaks German and there was a woman who translated the German into Russian during the service that ran one hour and 15 minutes – without communion. Pastor Oleg from the Seminary did parts of this service. After the service we walked to the city center and ate lunch in a cafeteria. For 7 people the total came to 203 hryvnia - \$25. The going-away dinner that night was attended by 11 people and we had a nice visit with our dear Ukrainian friends.

Monday morning (**June 18**) we slept late knowing that we were headed home. Pastors Alexi and Oleg and the Seminary were having meetings that morning attended by members of all Lutheran Churches in Ukraine. We saw pastors and church members that we knew from a number of churches. We arrived at the airport with ample time and said our sad good-bys to our translators and Pastor Oleg. It is always difficult saying goodbye to the translators who become such an integral part of our team. This year's mission trip was again successful, with more days in Ukraine than we have had on previous trips.

Kagarlyk:

The first five days of our mission were spent in the small village of Kagarlyk. There is a small church and congregation there which was ministered to in years past by Misha, who is an Elder. We had heard that Misha was very ill with a stomach tumor, so we were very happy to see him at the church when we arrived. Yuri, a seminary student, was living in the village to conduct worship services from the summer and lead the congregation. His wife, Luda, was running a Sunday school program for the kids.

We did our program every day for the children in the village - each day we did a different skit and craft with games. Some days we were able to see the children twice a day. Usually we had about 40 children in attendance. The children were excited to see us, and enjoyed hearing the lessons we were teaching.

On our last day in Kagarlyk, we were able to go to an orphanage North of Belyaevka. It was explained to us that this is not a long-term care orphanage. Rather, it acted as an intake facility for children just entering the state care system. They are assessed and treated for physical, mental, and psychological illnesses before being transferred to a long term care orphanage. We were able to do our complete program with the children, and Misha delivered a message. Yuri, Luda, and their two children also accompanied us, and we all enjoyed the time we were able to interact and play with the kids. Before leaving, we distributed small gifts to each of the children, and we left cakes with the staff members.

Misha requested 20 - 30 quilts be sent so he could give them to the children at this orphanage. After following up with the quilting group, we have now shipped 24 quilts to this orphanage. Shipping was paid for through our congregational donations.

At the end of our trip, we had about 750 hryvnia (\$94) left in our monetary gifts fund, which we unanimously decided should be donated to Misha for his continuing medical expenses.

Savran:

The team arrived at the church in Savran around 7 pm on Wednesday June 6th. A service for the youth was just wrapping up, so as they finished we were able to greet many familiar faces. All of the older orphans who stay to help the Smokvin family were there and greeted us warmly. Others we remember are Nikoli and his family, Pastor Popal and Pastor Kostuk (both from the near by villages), Tatyana (she speaks and teaches English there in Savran) and Pastor Oleg from the seminary in Odessa. There were some new faces, many youth from Savran and also a team of missionaries from Finland. Very fun to here of their adventures in English – it is always nice to be able to speak in our native language!!

The biggest update in Savran is that there are 5 “orphans” living above the church now. This fulfilled one of Pastor Nikoli’s prayers for the orphans, as they would age out of the orphanage Tech School program. Most of our outreach included their help setting up and playing in our game time. We are overjoyed that Misha, an orphan who had aged out of the program and fell away from the church and Pastor Nikoli’s family, has returned to church here and he came with us on a few of our day missions. Our work was split into two visits per day and returning to the church for our noon and evening meals. Some brief swimming at the river occurred to help us cool off from the Increasing heat and humidity.

We went to Peshana orphanage first where Pete and Dawn were remembered. The children had been told of our arrival and all 40 or so children were very excited to see us. There were more workers this year as at least half of these orphans are mentally challenged, so our cross and bead necklace was a great craft for them. They loved the skit and enjoyed Kaitlyn being the mischievous puppy!

As it turned out our scheduled visit to the Borshe orphanage was cancelled at the last minute one morning, so we returned to Peshana orphanage to play an intense game of soccer with the children and hold another program. We were told these children had prayed for our return, to their surprise it was much sooner than expected.

The only other orphanage we visited was a "foster village" where we had been last year. This was our most difficult assignment. The villagers were not ready for us, so we had to wait a long time before all of the children arrived. While waiting, a group of young adults were drinking and becoming very disruptive. Even once our skit and crafts started, there were a couple men that interrupted us several times and were asked to leave. Despite the trouble, Nikoli gave a short message, which was followed by some games before we left, in what seemed to us hurry.

We also gathered once at each of the village churches- Orcharedna and Ostrovka. This is always pleasant as Pastors and their wives always help with things and play along at the games and parachute, Frisbee, and volleyball. This year we had about 25 children and 6 or more adults. They seem to be so happy that we come to visit them. We have become more familiar with each other and it almost feels like family!

They have requested our help in renovating the farmhouse they have purchased; it is the one we reported on last year. The house is for the orphans who continue to participate in church and activities at the church who have aged out of the orphanages. Pastor Nikoli reports that contacts in Germany have donated and Canadian contacts are going to help also.

This year brought us back to the Retirement center. There is a new director here that has changed things in a very positive way. Being it was so hot, we gathered in a very shady, breezy spot where there are picnic tables and room for a few chairs. All the Smokvin family and the live in youth came to sing and play guitar. It was beautiful. We all sang and visited with the residents. They wanted to get hugs and hold our hand and try to talk to us, it did not matter that we could not understand them. They were smiling as we handed out our team picture and said our goodbyes.

Our last day in Savran was Sunday June 10th. We attended church and Pete gave a message, which was followed by our team singing a song for them. During the service we presented Nikoli with all the t-shirts, books, travel communion sets, and other gifts that we brought for all three

churches. After service and lunch, we were packed up for our late afternoon, with Bogdan Miller driving. We traveled a longer route than in previous years, but with better roads the van was able to travel at a consistent speed. We stopped at a rock formation along the river, similar to a state park and arrived in Mykolaiv at 10 PM.

Mykolaiv:

Beginning Monday, **June 11**, Pastor Miller became our van driver. Our first stop was at the Ministry of Education to discuss our planned trip to the Little Eagle camp in a few days. Like in the past, the Minister was very friendly and pleasant to us. She stressed that we were going to give the children "English Lessons" and "Life Lessons." We agreed, but our plan was to use the Bible for both as much as possible. We were also invited to another orphan camp that had some special needs children. We later heard that no other church group – even the Orthodox Church – had ever been allowed to go to this camp.

We went to the Boys Detention Home along the river where there were only 12 boys (in the past there were twice this number). We were told that parents were allowed to take some of the boy's home for a Ukrainian Holiday that day – Ukraine playing Sweden for the European Soccer Championship. The team performed a skit about forgiveness and the boys did the 3-nail cross craft and did quite well at it. Afterward we played Frisbee with them. We had given them a new volleyball net and 2 new basketball nets. We told them we would get them a new volleyball because theirs was flat.

That afternoon we went to the Mentally Handicapped Men's Home south of Mykolaiv, where the men met us in an auditorium-like room on the second floor, with the exception of Yuri who eagerly met us as we pulled up in the van. They were seated on chairs in this room. This situation was more structured than in past years where we met them out in a courtyard with a lot of milling around by the men. We sang 3 songs and gave a short talk before the men began asking questions. We were asked about "how each of us had become Christians" and each team member and the 2 translators gave a short version about their Christian experiences. Afterward some team members said this was the first time they had ever had to answer that question. So, in addition to the men, this was a growth experience for these team members as well. We distributed prayer journals that the team had assembled the previous evening. We were there just over an hour. On leaving, one man said that he remembered Carl and Nichole (who last visited in 2006) – we gave him a photo of the current team.

On Tuesday, **June 12**, the team was scheduled to visit a smaller (about 100 children) "orphanage" (where most were mentally handicapped) upon request of the Ministry of Education, but at the last minute this was rescinded. Pastor Miller easily substituted a first-time visit to 2 smaller villages 80 kilometers NE of Mykolaiv – about 1½ hour driving time. At the first village, where

Pastor Miller has established a church, there were 21 children and 5 adults. A young girl about 8-years old greeted Pete in English, saying her name was Olga, and asking his name. Turns out this was about the full extent of her English, but she remained friendly and helped Pete as soccer goalie for the American team – we lost 2 to 1. We spent our time here with our program of a skit, games, and craft and also played with the parachute.

The building, formally a house, was purchased for about \$300. Pastor Miller is converting it into a church. However it needs a lot of work – the roof alone needs \$500 worth of repairs, and he has plans for changing the rooms inside. Pastor Miller asked us for financial help with this project. We advised him that we would present this request back at our church. We then went to a local home for refreshments.

The second village was 7 minutes due east of the first (and closer to the main road). There were 26 children and 14 adults here. We were invited inside for the skit and then outside under a tree for the craft. After playing with the parachute and Red Rover (you are chosen), we also played volleyball, stringing the net across the main street.

Wednesday **June 13**, the team toured the shopping area and waterfront of Mykolaiv in the morning. In the afternoon we visited the other Lutheran Church in Mykolaiv (previously referred to as "Yuri's church" for Pastor Yuri Maskov – but has not had a pastor since shortly after our 2010 visit.) There were 11 children and 3 adults—all active Christians who greatly enjoyed being with the team. We played telephone in replacement of a skit to give the message that God hears us and sang songs before doing the prayer booklet craft in an upstairs room. The children really like the English song "Oh, I need the Lord to Help Me" and after singing it twice with them, they preformed the song without our help. They requested we return next year.

Pastor Miller had advised us that the Little Eagle Camp was expecting us to donate a video camera – something they had requested when we visited last year. We advised him that our Church Council had decided that because this was not a Christian organization, this was not as important as giving a \$1 K professional video camera to Alpha-Omega – which we did this year. Zhenya, one of the translators, pointed out that we did not need to spend so much for a video camera for the camp, and he found a camera and card on-line for \$237. Because this camera was an emergency needed to keep the "door open" at this camp for our team and for Pastor Miller, the team decided we needed to buy this gift for the camp. The three adult team members split the balance of the cost, so that no church funds were spent.

The next day we bought the Boys Home 2 soccer balls and dropped them off before driving to the Little Eagle Camp. At the camp we had lunch at 2 with free time until meeting with some children from 4:30 until about 6:30. Because we were supposedly teaching English, we stressed

songs in English and downplayed Bible verses from the Russian Bible. We did not perform a skit; instead we sat in a circle of benches and got to know several of the orphans, especially Seroja who would be a great help to us the rest of our stay at Little Eagle. We played a game to see who could speak the most English words in one minute and gave the winners some prizes. The children would wander in and out of the area where we were sitting. At any one time there were between 30 and 50 children in attendance.

That evening we were introduced to all of the children who were then in the camp by being invited up on stage. After introductions, Pete gave a very brief talk. Because the camp officially opened the next morning there were only about 400 to 450 children, rather than the 667 we were told would be there while in Mykolaiv.

June 15 brought us back to the stage area for the official opening of the camp. There were approximately 670 children in attendance with ages running from about 6 to 17. Some of the different orphanages that come to the camp performed either a dance or a song or both, and 2 professional Ukrainian singers performed. The complete opening lasted exactly 1 hour.

We then met with children again until lunch. We were developing a regular group of about 40 children with others wandering in and out. Pastor Miller led a number of discussions with different children about Christ and the Bible. The team did more songs in English, a skit about being chosen by God and then a picture frame with Jesus hands craft. We stopped when most of the children were called to lunch. Later afternoon we meet again with children for more songs and games. Pastor Miller ran a number of games that provided a prize for the child who did best. These were very popular. We continued to get new kids plus kids we had seen before. This was a very successful day for Pastor Miller and us and at no time did we see any camp staff near our area (true all 3 days).

After dinner we met with some of the children for an informal discussion session. One boy had visited relatives in California and asked questions about why everything was so clean and neat in America. There were also questions about Christianity and some were hard to answer. Some of the boys stayed behind to ask more serious questions about their life and God. We were happy to have Pastor Miller in attendance. We did end up referring a 16-year-old boy, Oleg, to make regular visits with Pastor Oleg at the seminary. He was having some strong 'belief' issues and lives in an Odessa orphanage. We went to bed about 11 after a long day.

After breakfast on Saturday, **June 16**, we had 3 hours with the children. We sang songs, did a skit about forgiveness and made crosses. The number of children at the start of cross-making was about 40, but by the end of this craft we had given out all of the cross kits (93) and had to turn some of the kids away empty handed. We also played a few games.

We met the orphan campers again at 4:30 to sing some songs, do the butterfly craft and say goodbye. Before leaving, we gave the Assistant Camp Director the video recording camera and a SD memory card. She was very appreciative and enthusiastic to receive this equipment and expressed those sentiments to the team. Some of the children were very sad to see us depart and hung around the van as we packed it, several of whom did not allow us to carry anything. We left exactly at 6PM for the drive of just over an hour to the seminary. Overall, Mykolaiv was a big success.