

Ukraine Mission Trip 2009

We left ROA at 2:30 a.m. on the 3rd of June. We left DIA with no problems at 6:30 a.m.

We arrived in Odessa the afternoon of June 4th, relieved that we and our luggage were able to make our final connection after a 2 hour weather delay in Washington DC. We were warmly greeted in the Odessa airport by Pastor Sasha & Olga, a past interpreter from the local Lutheran Church. After leaving the airport we picked up Larysa who would be our interpreter for the first part of our mission. That night we stayed at Pastor Sasha's house and had dinner there prepared by Pastor Sasha's wife Ola. The next day we drove out to the seminary, which is still under construction. The first thing we noticed was the attractive fence and gate that surrounded the site. This fence was financed by Rock of Ages and had a lovely plaque that read "Thanks be to God for the 'Rock of Ages' Lutheran Church, Colorado Springs, CO USA for their support in building of this fence". Pastor Sasha gave us a tour of the facility, which has made significant progress since last year, but still needs several rooms completed before they can start operations of the seminary.

Before leaving Odessa we went to the electronics store and bought a DVD audio system and then to the Christian bookstore to buy children's bibles and DVDs and for the Kagarlyk church.

From Odessa we traveled to the village of Kagarlyk where we first ministered in 2008. The church in Kagarlyk no longer has a vicar as their leader and is now being lead by their elder Mikhail (Mesha) with visits from Pastor Sasha for communion. We stayed in the upper rooms (up The Stairs) of the church again. The church hired a meal preparer for us whom we compensated. Our wonderful meals had that indelible essence of dill that reminded us that we indeed were in the Ukraine. Most of our ministry was targeted to the kids again. We saw many of the same children that we saw last year plus a few new ones. The kids really liked the sports balls we brought them and convinced us to play with them. The skits, songs, and crafts all went well with the kids. The kid's biblical knowledge appeared to be very good. However this year we didn't get to spend time with a larger audience of kids from the local school like we did last year.

Elder Mesha was really thrilled for the gift to the congregation of the DVD player and audio system along with the DVDs. They are now able to play DVDs through the projector they got last year.

Mesha made arrangements for us to meet the mayor of the village who helped us in the distribution of blankets/quilts and work gloves. The mayor drove Mesha, John Y, John B, & Larysa around in his little Lada (Russian car) to some of the very poor people in the village that we hadn't previously known about. The gifts were much appreciated by those whom we were able to meet.

On Sunday we attended worship service with our host congregation. The service was well attended. John B gave a message on the theme "Man's labor and the rest we have in Christ" and we sang a hymn. A Christ Candle was given to the congregation along with gifts of work gloves, children's winter gloves & hats, sewing materials, soaps, and reading glasses.

Kagarlyk in its own way shows stark contrasts similar to the rest of the Ukraine. An enduring image we have is seeing people getting their water from a community well, just like people did during the earthly life of our Lord, while also seeing a cell phone tower less than a mile away in the background. We pray that our work there gives living water of love and care while proclaiming a message of hope and salvation from the tower of God's word.

After Odessa and Kagarlyk, we are off to Mykolaiv. We took Larysa to the bus and picked up another translator, Viktor. Viktor was just shy of 16 years old and was an Orthodox Christian. We were glad to have someone close to Dustin's age in our team. In Mykolaiv we met the Miller family and were received with much warmth and love. They are the pattern of Christian families. We met our second translator who was already there, Peter. Peter is a 29 year old architect, who was currently without work. He is a Baptist and a wonderful translator and companion for us. After a meal we went to the local market and bought more water and several snack items.

On the first full day we started by going to the men's mentally handicapped home, where John Y. gave a short presentation trying to teach them the importance of prayer, by telling them about the five-finger prayer and Yura gave a long thank you to our team. We are always so well received by the staff there. We were able to leave playing cards with the caregivers and distributed the ball caps, and sunglasses to individual members of the center.

Finally we were given a tour of the grounds and they told us about raising a good deal of their fresh produce right there on the grounds. They are also feeling the pinch of hard times and have had to endure some cutting of funds. Then finally we were invited to talk with the fellow who makes the pretty things out of scraps and we were given a couple of woven and sewed small rugs.

After getting back to Miller's for lunch we rushed to Yura Maskov's church to do the skits and crafts with about 20 children and then played outside with the parachute. It was good to see Viktor and Yula Maskov that last year were in Kagarlyk.

Dinner and fellowship, then some of the team went to the supermarket to buy underclothing and socks for the boys in the center. The rest of us prepared for a good sleep.

The morning took us to the boy's rehabilitation center, where we did our skits, taught them the silly songs that they just loved and enjoyed the wreath craft. We gave them the things we had bought for them, plus some soccer and basketball and some ping-pong paddles and balls. We were given a tour of the boy's woodworking area. We then had a meeting with the head of the rehabilitation center. This was a first, as we had never met with the man who actually runs the center. Most of the gifts had to be left with the caregivers, along with some basic fishing gear for the boys who get to go fishing in the river.

Then back to the Millers to eat before continuing to Yura's church again. We did the Easter skit and the cross craft and played with the parachute again. The children demanded a repeat of Dustin's song. We gave gifts of stuffed animals and gifts to the adults.

We then spent some time with the Miller's, visited the sanctuary and gave him the Christ candle. Then we set out for a picnic prepared by Gena Miller, he seems like he always has time to spend with us and then prepare a wonderful meal on the riverbank that was enjoyed by all. The boys all went swimming in the cold river.

Gena has also invited us to work with a group of deaf children in the Mykolaiv area and we will look into doing that next year. After a good nights rest and a good breakfast we are off to the Crimea.

Our mission trip after Mykolaiv continued on to Yalta area of Crimea. We drove all day by bus. Due to confusion with the schedule, we arrived a day earlier than our hosts had planned. Pastor Rudolph Krause quickly extended the arrangements for us in Yalta. It turns out he booked a hotel near where he lives, which actually was better for us as a group and allowed us to know Pastor Rudolph and his family better. We took two casual meals out with him and his family and were able to visit and have fun. We also did some swimming in the Black Sea and sight seeing of Yalta that was easier done by staying near.

There was a cafeteria where we took most of our meals. It was just a short walk from our hotel. We were also close to night activities in Yalta and a supermarket where we could buy supplies.

We visited the TB sanatorium in Alupka over the course of three days, with approximately two one-hour sessions each day. The groups we visited were the youngest and middle-aged children. Some children were in beds and being actively treated, while others were there for summer rehabilitation. We shared our skits and songs over the three days and crafts over two. Songs that involved participation from the groups were best received. We sang Father Abraham in English and Rudolph led the groups in Russian. Dustin gave his message to the middle-aged children.

We also visited a special education school and performed a skit, sang songs, and completed a craft. This was our first visit to this facility. It is the same facility where Pastor Rudolph has conducted his weekly worship services.

We visited the elderly women's center again this year. We sang hymns with Rudolph playing guitar and reading a Psalm. John B. gave a short message.

The culmination of our visit was a church service with Pastor Krause and his congregation. We sang for them and Steve gave his message. We presented a Christ candle to him. Then we made our way to Simferopol to catch the train.

Next, our mission trip included our first visit to a city on the Dnieper River. Although we were unsure of the reason for our travel to East-Central Ukraine, we made our plans to include Dnepropetrovsk as Pastor Alexey had requested. We took the night train from our Crimean mission area. It was a first for most of us to travel by train across country in a sleeper car.

Alexey met us at the train station with a van. He took us to the apartment where he had made arrangements for us to stay. It is used for Christian university students that need housing. All but one of the students, Rodion, were away for summer break and so we all had a bed and a shower.

We then briefly visited Peter's home, before touring some of Dnepro (as it is called by locals). Alexey and Sasha (Peter's brother) took us through the Orthodox regional office-where we spoke with a leader-then their bookstore and the church. We drove around sight seeing and Sasha told us about the city. We all think this city is beautiful and full of history. We ate lunch at a mall and then we walked the riverfront "board walk". We meet up with Rodion here and then all of us take the van over to Viktor's house!

This is where we learn one of the reasons Alexey brought us here. We meet the man (Viktor) behind the broadcasts for Alpha and Omega. He, along with his family, record and produce a monthly Christian broadcast for T.V. We saw samples of their work and learned more about this tremendous outreach. Viktor gave us samples of the broadcast and a DVD on the Alpha and Omega program. We got to see the offices of A & O and the inner workings of this group. When we left we understand the vast audience this group reaches every year.

After a Ukrainian meal at a cafeteria, we head back to the apartment and stay up late sharing with Rodion about our mission and his journey of faith.

The next morning we meet up with Pastor Alexey to go over our trip and make plans for the next year. It was decided to leave the parachute with him for his camp and other uses throughout his year. It will still be available for our future missions. Then we picked up his family from his house and we drove to a neighboring village, Zarya, to visit a school. Many children greeted us, some of which dressed in traditional Ukraine clothing and brought us a loaf of friendship bread. It is to be offered around until every shares of the bread. We were lead through the school by the headmaster, Sveta -who is also very active in the A & O. She showed us all the specials and regular curriculum. The school has high achievers and we could see all the proof of this posted around on the school walls. Pastor Alexey is allowed to teach Christian ethics in this public school. She has given us the invitation to hold a camp on their grounds. After the tour we were invited to her home where she and her mother served a lavish lunch. We ate, visited, and really enjoyed ourselves.

The last thing we did was to attend a special church service at Alexey's church back in Dnepro. He planned it for our visit. Many young adults came. We sang songs and Steve and John B. were able to share their short messages with them. We gave him a gift of the Christ candle before we all left. Then we took the train again, with Alexey leading us, back to Odessa.