

It's been eight years since we first visited Ukraine to help pastor Gregori plant the first "Church of Praise". (October 1993). It had not been our plan or desire to be involved in Ukraine. On the contrary, our attention was on places like India, China and Indonesia (part of our heart is still in those parts of the world). We had no leading or burden for the Russian speaking world. But God did. He had a big burden and a big vision for the Soviet world! In spite of -- and through the midst of -- decades of communist oppression, God prepared a harvest so large that the entire Church around the world would need to work together to see it brought in.

Our lives changed on a Saturday morning in May of 1993. I was leading a men's prayer meeting in our hometown, with the help of pastor Roger Sutch. About fifty men from various churches were in attendance. We had invited Howard Foltz to speak, a mission leader from Regent University, a man with God's heart for the world. Howard had just returned from the Soviet Union, and spoke to us that Saturday morning of the overwhelming harvest that he had witnessed in Russia. He had witnessed entire auditoriums full of people coming to Christ all at once. He also told of a fall project already in motion to raise partners in the USA to assist pastors in the countries of the former Soviet Union who were ready to plant new churches to bring in the harvest.

During that men's prayer meeting, the Holy Spirit fell on me in an unexpected way. As Howard spoke, I saw a vision of migrant farm workers. Migrant farm workers earn their living by traveling to various places to gather in the harvest of ripened crops. I was seeing in that vision how their lives and their location are determined by the ripening of the harvest. Where ever the harvest is ripe -- that is where they have to go. They can't choose their place of work out of their own desires. They must follow the harvest.

I knew God was showing me His heart about the harvest in the Russian speaking world. In His presence that morning it no longer mattered where I thought I should be working. "My vision" -- whatever I thought it was -- began to seem irrelevant. What mattered most, in the holy presence, was what God was doing -- what was on HIS heart, and what was HIS vision. He had prepared a huge harvest in the Soviet Union. I became aware that it was time for everyone to help bring in the harvest, regardless of our other responsibilities. Like farmers who work together in each other's fields to bring in the harvest, it was time for us all to lend a hand with the great harvest. We didn't need a special call. We just needed adjust our lives and lend a hand to help!

When Howard finished speaking, I felt in my heart that there was only one way to end the meeting. We had to have an altar call for those willing to go and help plant churches. I put myself at the altar first and then invited anyone else willing to go help reap this harvest to join me at the altar.

Half of the fifty men in attendance came forward in response to that invitation. I was taken back by such a large response, and wasn't sure what to do next. We decided to invite all those who had responded to the call to come for prayer on Monday mornings, five o'clock a.m. (I chose that hour partly because of men's work schedules, and partly to find out who was serious.) They all came, and some brought spouses and friends!

Jackie, when told of what happened in the men's prayer meeting, knew right away that this was God at work.

After six months of Monday morning prayer, six teams had formed from six churches, most led by their pastors -- pastors who had also responded to that Saturday morning altar call. We simply told the mission leaders who were coordinating the church planting outreach to send our teams wherever they wished us to go. Our particular team was assigned to Krivoy Rog. We had never heard of the place, and had no thought of ever going to Ukraine. We went there because we were assigned to go there -- with great joy! That was October, 1993.

Like Howard Foltz had seen in Russia, we also experienced in Krivoy Rog: an entire auditorium of eight hundred people rose together to accept Christ! Not being sure if they had understood the invitation, I had them all sit down, and then explained the call to repentance again. Again they all stood. We couldn't call them to the front, since the entire crowd wanted to repent! I was still unsure if they understood correctly, and had them sit down again. I preached again and explained again what it meant to give their lives to Jesus. They all stood for the third time.

The first "Church of Praise" was born that day. A two-week mission trip for us turned into an ongoing friendship and partnership with Gregori and Galena, pastors and overseers of all the "Churches of Praise". We have become "migrant laborers" in this ripened harvest field, and so have some of our friends! What a privilege! As most of you know, that first church planted eight years ago has now become twenty-seven "Churches of Praise"! Twenty-three are in Krivoy Rog, two are in Dnepropetrovsk, and two are in regional prisons near Krivoy Rog. The two prison churches are only weeks old, as is one of the churches in Dnepropetrovsk. (over)

The Main Church building, 1300 people

Pastors Gregori and Galena Sukhina



Now there is also a three-year "Praise Bible College". The new school year is about to begin, (the fourth year since it began) with perhaps a hundred full time students expected, and another 200 in evening classes. Many other ministries have developed as well to serve the harvest -- from the Shining Glory Rehab center for addicts, to countless neighborhood home groups, to the Lovelines Crisis Phone Counseling Center. More than 120 Alpha courses, which are ten-week Bible studies for unchurched people, have been conducted all over the city. And so on...

By the way, you are serving this harvest as well -- though you may never have been there! The Lord enables us to go and to keep going -- only through your friendship, your prayer and your support! Thank you.

Our next trip to Ukraine...

Jackie and I are planning to leave for Ukraine in mid October, just six weeks from now. Though we have been there quite a few times over the last eight years, no journey is routine. As always, it is an adventure of faith, looking to the Lord to supply every need. (as is every week for us.) We never know just HOW it will happen, but we believe it WILL happen. We have learned that God's supply is released through faith and prayer, so we ask you to join us in an agreement of faith and prayer. God is the one who directs the financial supply. Thank you for trusting the Lord with us.

We will teach in the Bible School as usual this fall, hopefully spending much time teaching the new students, laying the foundation of Christ, His death and resurrection, the blood covenant, and our new life in Christ. We have seen how much the students change and grow once this foundation is laid.

In addition, the plan is to open two new churches in Ukraine. This will happen in the city of Kharkov, near the Russian border. Two families have already moved from Krivoy Rog to Kharkov to begin the work. We are grateful that funds have been given for the initial expenses of opening these churches and supporting these two Ukrainian church planting families. Please pray for them, as this is a MAJOR step of faith for them. One couple, pastors Valodia and Svieta, have five children. The other married couple have been the worship leaders in Valodia and Svieta's present church (which is only two years old.)

Ongoing needs in Ukraine...

We'd like to remind you of Ukrainian projects that are ongoing opportunities for giving. There are other areas, but we are especially concerned that these be remembered.

1. Daily food for the Bible School

It is a major and important ministry to provide daily meals for the Bible School students, and for recovering addicts in the Shining Glory rehab center, and for a steady stream of homeless poor. For many of the students, it is their only food. If the main church provided for this on their own, it would take all of the church's income.

2. Bibles

As long as there is a harvest of souls, Bibles are needed. Thousands are needed every year to meet the need of new converts and those who are hungry for God. The requests are far greater than the supply.

3. Children's ministries

The needs of children tend to be overlooked by many. Thank the Lord for the creative resourcefulness of Tanya and Igor who head up the children's ministry among the churches. Literature, sports equipment, games, crafts, literature, camping gear, sound systems, keyboards, etc. are all needed. The modern world of electronics is coming to Ukraine. The church needs colorful and up-to-date ways of attracting the kids. The children are the church of tomorrow, and need a firm foundations laid early in their lives, so that they might be solid believers preserved from the perverse culture around them.

4. Pharmacy for the poor

A free pharmacy for those in need is housed in the main church. It is for the neediest who attend church, the city homeless shelters, and the prisons. Doing this requires more finances -- for purchase of medicines in Ukraine (now available for a price unreachable for most) and for medicines that need to be purchased here in the USA. (Vitamins for mommas and babies; and medicines for scabies and other skin diseases which are epidemic.)

5. Lovelines

This is a crisis phone counseling hotline for the community, housed in the main church. Counselors always at the phones, praying for the addicted and the sick, for broken families, and helping people in deep trouble. It brings great fruit, and works best when it is advertised regularly in local newspapers. \$100 a month makes Lovelines known to many thousands of addicted and broken people!

6. Musical Instruments

This is not so much a need for finances, as a request for instruments to send to Ukraine: guitars, trumpets, clarinets, flutes, etc. (Many sit unused in American closets.) Many accomplished musicians without instruments are in these churches.

The blessing of the Lord IS on your family. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, and keep yourself in the awareness of His unending love. He never leaves you or forsakes you. He will take good care of you.

With love, **John and Jackie**