



Lifeline

...a prayer letter from John and Jackie

May 24, 2002



Dear friends,

We greet you again in the wonderful name of Jesus! You are a great blessing to us, and it is a privilege for us to write to you!

Ukraine teams coming and going...

Though we are home, a large part of our attention is still on the work in Ukraine, where teams are coming and going most every month. Our friends, Steve and Marilyn Hill, ministers based in Holland, are now in Krivoy Rog, along with a young man named Luke, who has come out of the revival in Pensacola, Florida. He and others moved to Holland and set up a base to reach the young lost generation of Europe. They call themselves the Fire Team, and indeed do carry the fire of God in them. In Ukraine, Luke is speaking in the high schools, Steve and Marilyn in the Bible College, and as a team they are doing youth conferences in the two largest Churches of Praise. There is a great hunger among youth, and not much has been done for them up until now.

Five days after this team leaves, another team from Minnesota arrives: three pastors – Jeff Orluck, Earl Ready, and Debbie, and a fourth team member Linda from Jeff’s church. They will spend their time having conferences in some of the daughter Churches of Praise for the purposes of evangelism, building up believers and encouraging church leaders. Please pray that the conferences will bring encouragement and strength to the daughter churches.

No team is scheduled for July, when the Churches of Praise have their summer children’s camps. There is a great need to help the camps financially. The children’s workers function somehow, but with pitifully few resources.

In early August, a team of fourteen from Elk River, MN will go, hopefully followed by some of the Holland Fire Team. These teams will run a month-long Bible College for teens and do other kinds of outreaches among the churches.

By God’s grace, in September, we will go again. Want to go with us?

Church Planting around Ukraine...

At least seven new church planting efforts are in motion right now, mostly as outreaches from the established churches, four of them in new cities. Typically a new minister is raised up under an older pastor, put in charge of various ministries, and encouraged to launch out in evangelism, and establish new cell groups. This activity may result in a new church not far away, or this minister may be seen as ready to go to another city and start a new church. Others help with this process, including Bible college students, worship teams, evangelism teams, children’s workers, Alpha teachers, mostly volunteers from other churches. So, planting new churches is a work of the whole family of the Churches of Praise.

Our part, and the part of other foreign teams who are sent, is to encourage this process in whatever way possible, from helping with evangelism and preaching to training leaders to financial assistance. Building expenses, sound equipment, advertising, temporary pastor support, transportation, etc. – all this and more is an urgent financial need during the first two years of planting a new church. Such assistance is needed in all the new church plants. Please agree with us for funds to help them.

And now...Kyrgystan!

The first foreign church planting team is being launched from the Churches of Praise – into the nation of Kyrgystan. This country

of five million is on the western border of China, above Afghanistan and Tajikistan. 70% Muslim, yet with a non-Islamic government that allows evangelism and church planting, it is a gateway into the Muslim world. Two families from the Churches of Praise are traveling to Kyrgystan to begin planting new Churches of Praise. One of these families –Uri, Olga and six year old Nastia— has already been there for two and one half years, learning and working in church planting under the direction of another organization. Now ready to launch out on their own, they requested of Pastor Gregori to work under his authority to establish new Churches of Praise in Kyrgystan where there are no churches.

We met with this family several times while in Krivoy Rog, discussing how they might begin. Pastor Gregori will travel to Kyrgystan in June to help them make the transition from working with another organization in one city to pioneering on their own in the large capital city of Bishkak. We were able to commit funds to cover part of their first year of support — from a gift given for church planting last winter. More will be needed soon, so if the Lord lays it on your heart to help support these Ukrainian missionaries to Kyrgystan, please let us know. A family needs about \$200 a month, in addition to ministry expenses.

Ukrainians are well accepted in Kyrgystan, and in the other “stan” nations of central Asia, and since the Russian language is common, they can communicate well with most people.

We are excited about this! It is like a watershed event in our hearts. Since the beginning of the work in Ukraine, we have looked for the day when the Churches of Praise would begin to send church planting teams to other nations. It seems the time has come.

Gregori may also go into China on this trip, for the purpose of “spying out the land” for church planting in China.

Uri was formerly a drug dealer in Krivoy Rog, and Olga one of his drug addicts. They lived together outside of marriage and had baby Nastia together. Then Uri became a believer, and told Olga they could no longer live together. He began to pray for Olga’s salvation. She was, according to Uri and Gregori (Olga was Gregori’s neighbor), a terrible person – belligerent, criminal, and dangerous. Everybody thought Uri should give up on her, but he wouldn’t, and after three years of prayer she finally decided to follow Jesus. A great miracle! They both became “firebrands” for the Lord. However, she was then sent to prison on previous drug charges, where she became an even stronger believer and a minister of the gospel. Meanwhile, Uri went to Kyrgystan to begin missionary work. Olga joined him six months later, straight from prison. (Olga is the first missionary we have known who went straight from prison to the mission field!) We were deeply touched by thier character and their passion for Jesus and for the Kyrgese people.

Olga immediately began to go into the prisons of Kyrgystan (much worse than the prisons in Ukraine). She even got into the men’s prisons, where women are never allowed. An American living in Kyrgystan supported her outreach into the prison (\$300 a month) so she could carry in food and literature. Last winter that American went back to the USA, and support for this prison outreach ended. The mission with whom Uri and Olga had been working told them that prisons were not part of their vision, so support ended and outreach to the prisons was stopped.

They asked us if we had a vision for prisons. I told them, “What

is important is what God has in YOUR heart. We support what God has called you to do." This is how we work. We do not import our vision or an American vision, but look for the vision God is putting on the hearts of the Ukrainians, and adopt that vision as our own. We then want to do whatever we can to support and encourage what God is giving them to do.

It's one thing to have vision. It's another thing to have the funds to support the vision. We'd like to at least replace the \$300 a month for food and literature, so they can go back into the prisons of Kyrgystan. (The food is what opens the door to the prison.) Please pray with us that support for this new prison work will be released.

Food for the hungry: an increased need...

The work in Kyrgystan prisons means that more support for feeding prisoners is needed. Since last summer, we have been sending \$700 a month for prisoners in Ukraine, thanks to a few large contributions given last year for the prison work. That fund will deplete by autumn of this year. *Will you believe God with us that monies for this important work will continue?* A church in another Ukraine prison is also about to be established, and we want to help them as well. It's a great investment; a modest amount of money goes a long way. Food is brought in for believers in prison, and the believers then set aside an amount for the most neglected prisoners. They then distribute it with prayer, love and the gospel. This \$700 a month has sparked a prison church of more than 300 believers -- who are now also requesting a Bible College in the prison!

What a great use of humanitarian aid, not only to feed hungry bodies, but also hungry souls! The monthly support for feeding prisoners needs to multiply, now that several prisons and two countries are involved. *Thanks for praying with us about this ongoing and increasing ministry.*

The feeding program goes in two or three other directions as well. Outreach is going on into a tuberculosis hospital in Krivoy Rog, where very little food is available to the patients and many are left by their families to die. Many are becoming believers and some healed, and the door into that hospital opens wide when food is brought in. \$200 a month provides a great weekly blessing into the worst ward, where it seems now a church will be planted!

Another way that hungry people are fed is through the main church kitchen. The church kitchen feeds perhaps 150 people each day — homeless and hungry, as well as recovering addicts, and Bible College students.

The Word stops a bullet and saves a policeman!

One great story we need to tell you. Do you remember the bandits who entered Gregori and Galena's apartment two years ago, who are now transformed by Jesus and in the Bible College? One is Kolya, who just planted a new church. One of the new converts is a policeman. He gave a testimony during our leadership conference of being protected from death a few days earlier, only three weeks after his conversion. One day, as he was leaving for work, he decided to put a Gideon new testament in his shirt pocket, not knowing why. He knew he would have no time to read it. He was called to a house where there was violence and drugs. Dressed in a bulletproof vest, he and his partner broke down the door and rushed in. Shots were fired at him — armor piercing bullets for which his vest was not made. A bullet hit his chest, passing through the bulletproof vest. It should have passed all the way through him and out his back. Instead it stopped...right in the middle of the Gideon New Testament! We saw the New Testament with the bullet hole right to the center! That Word of God saved His life! Upon hearing this testimony and seeing the Bible, the people in the conference went wild!

Vitali is soon to come home...

Pastor Gregori's son Vitali, who was hit by a van, is improving rapidly, much faster than could happen naturally. Gregori said, "His bones have knitted, he is without pain, and will soon be home." Hallelujah!

Thanks for praying!

We want to thank each of you who supports us in prayer, and those who continue to support us financially. Without these lifelines of prayer and giving, we would soon be unable to continue. In regard to prayer, we feel a great need, and ask you to remember to pray for us. *Our prayer shield seems thin these days.*

Thanks for giving!

In regard to finances, our own personal support needs to increase substantially, and in recent months has not. Now summer approaches, and as you may know, a financial strain often comes as people get distracted with summer activities. However, we believe summer is to be a time of advance in outreach and ministry, not a time of retreat. Thanks for agreeing with us for an increase!

Our summer in Minnesota...

We plan to be in Minnesota through August, and then return to Ukraine. Much of our time while at home will be taken up with Ukraine in some way or another -- such as communicating with teams who have returned or who are going, and maintaining friendships with churches and interested people for the purpose of supporting the work in Ukraine (and now Kyrgystan). Getting our website running is still on the unfinished list, and I hope to get a backlog of writing done, small books similar to the ones we have sent to you on occasion. I have been unable to make progress in writing for several months, and am praying for a breakthrough this summer.

We believe one purpose the Lord wants us at home this summer is to reach people for Jesus in our city. I (John) will be involved in the evangelistic activity of two or three ministries who work in our city during the summer months. *Pray for people to turn to Jesus.* In the midst of troubled times, many Americans have become more hungry for God. American cities are a ripe harvest field, especially the multi-ethnic heart of the cities, where the world is at our doorsteps. I invite any of you to join me. It is not threatening when you do it with others, and you can function according to your own faith and gifting. Give me a call if you want to be part of this.

One of the ripest harvests in our cities is among the Hispanic people, many of whom do not speak English. A year ago I was on the streets of North Minneapolis with a evangelism team. Wandering around an apartment complex filled with Hispanic immigrants, five of us led nearly sixty people to the Lord within an hour. We could have started a new church on the spot! And I could have prayed with many more than I did, if I had had a Spanish translator with me! Do you speak Spanish? Join me.

Ministry in churches...

We continue to feel called to ministry in USA churches, especially the area of your personal life with God, and the prayer life of the church. We are praying about a way to do this during the upcoming months, and ask you to pray with us for God's wisdom.

In closing...

Thanks again for your love and concern, your prayer and care of us and the ministry God has given us. Everything we do would be impossible without your support. We love and appreciate you highly, and pray for God's blessings to abound in your life.

Keep your eyes on Him, and trust Him with all your heart. Faith is *"the leaning of your entire personality on Him in absolute trust and confidence in His power, wisdom and goodness."* Amplified

With love,

John and Jackie