



Celebrating 40 years married!

Lifeline

...a prayer letter from John and Jackie



October 25, 2003

Dear friends,

We say hello again from Ukraine, “spiritual breadbasket for the nations!” (that’s what we believe about this country.)

I (John) am very glad to report that Jackie arrived here in Krivoy Rog safely on the 18th of October. After four weeks apart, we were really glad to be together again! She, of course, reminded me how boring my life is without her, and I, of course, agreed. Life is much better together!

It was great having pastor Bob Pullar and pastor Louie Vaillancourt with me for the first part of the trip. They were both such a blessing to the churches and the Bible college, and were greatly loved and appreciated by all. I hope they had a great time here, too. (I’ll ask them when we get home.) Bob’s teaching was with such clarity and boldness, and when Louie ministered it was like a heavy anointing came with each word. I am always amazed at how the Holy Spirit uses people, and am so grateful that these two men of God sacrificed their time to bring blessing to the Churches of Praise.

Following Bob and Louie’s departure I spent several days teaching in the day and evening Bible Colleges, and preaching in the two main churches. Soon, Marcia LaRock arrived from Holland. She took my place in the college, and I shifted gears to spend most of my time with pastor Gregory in the daily river of people coming to his office. Mostly this meant meeting with leaders, pastors and church planters, as well as other people from the church coming for counsel or help.

Pastor’s day in Krivoy Rog...

Pastor Gregory’s way of meeting with these people is very different than in my American experience. (In America many pastors take Monday off to rest. Not here.)

On arrival Monday morning at the church office, a group of people sit waiting. Gregory opens his office, and invites in the whole group of 6 or 12 or 17 people. Unless a person strongly wants a private meeting with him, all is done around the pastor’s table in a group setting. All the people wanting counsel are welcomed in. Mixed in are staff people needing questions answered. The issues brought might range from cancer to an evangelist needing bus fare. A couple of those present may be leaders with a conflict between them. Two or three others may come and sit down just to listen and learn. They may be called on for their opinion. When the issue is finished with one, the whole bunch prays over the person or persons. Then, on to the next one. The ones who are finished may stay and listen in to the next person’s issues.

Through it all, Gregory takes phone calls, Luba the administrator comes in and out with documents to sign or things to whisper in pastor’s ear, and the river of activity keeps flowing: especially on Monday, Pastors’ day, when everyone knows the door to the pastor is wide open. 9 a.m. till 9 p.m.

We had a week of such Pastor’s days, Gregory and I planning to meet with various pastors and church planters. Each day took on it’s own life, however, and became the same river of many kinds of people at the door.

Most pastors I know in America would be driven mad by such a Monday. This week it was also Tuesday through Friday.

Southwestern Ukraine...

Most of another week was given over to travel to southwestern Ukraine, on the border with the country of Moldova. That is where Galena, our village church planting hero, has been opening new Churches of Praise for the last nine months. After opening 23 churches near Krivoy Rog, she moved to this new region to begin again from nothing. As of today, she and her team have opened 25 more churches near that border with Moldova, and four more within Moldova itself. Already, leaders raised up from village converts are beginning to lead most of these new churches, assisted by Galena’s team.

Gregory and I traveled there by car, meeting with the mission team in the morning, and in the evening with several village churches brought together for the first time. In one place 100 people from five villages came. In another place 150 people gathered from eight villages. Buses were arranged to get many of them to the meeting. Many more would have gathered, had there been more buses available. Half the people in each place had not yet been saved, and all of these came to repent. It was really a glorious time. They were so hungry for God, and knew so little. Simple songs were taught so they could praise God together. They began to rejoice and lift their hands to God. Mind you, these meetings were in theaters with no heat, and little light. In fact, that area of the country has no heat at all in the towns. No gas, no hot water, and no heat through the winter. We were told that some people freeze to death during winter.

We of course, prayed for all who needed healing or had other problems. Some testified of God touching them right during the prayer.

Be nice to your mother-in-law...

I was a bit taken back by one babushka (grandma) who came in the prayer line for healing. She said her son-in-law had broken her legs and her ribs. Though it had happened some time ago, she still needed healing in her legs, she said. I asked her if she had forgiven her son-in-law.

She said simply and matter-of-factly, “I killed him.”

I think it was the tone of her voice that left me speechless — as if this was the obvious answer to my question.

I suppose the appropriate counsel was to say, “Well, now

that you killed him, you still need to forgive him.” ...but I just couldn't bring myself to say it...so I prayed for her legs to heal.

Yup, she really did do it, I later found out. Waited for her body to get better, hid in the bushes, and whacked him with an axe. Got thrown in prison without a trial.

Later, she was pardoned. It seemed her son-in-law was a violent man who had beaten his family, and soon might have killed them all. This was in a village area that Galena said was much more peaceful than Krivoy Rog. Whew! Maybe it's because the criminals there are whacked more swiftly.

I think I got one thing clear out of this time of prayer with her: *Don't mess with your mother-in-law!*

Growing pains...

While we've been here, we have seen and heard many problems and heartaches in the rapid expansion of evangelism and church planting. Some of this heartache is common to church life anywhere. People are the same all over, and as you might expect, relationships get strained, and misunderstandings develop. Rapid growth brings even more problems. People work in teams who have not known each other well before. People are thrust into new responsibilities beyond their training and experience.

With so much expansion, sometimes the strong and healthy ministers have to function without much care or support. The devil can take advantage of even a strong minister where there is not enough communication and love expressed. We have heard and felt some of this pain during the past month.

It is not a surprise that there are such problems. The surprise is that there are not more of them. It is remarkable to see so many people working together with joy in very difficult circumstances, with so little of anything except God and a few "comrades in arms" to help them. It is surprising to see fruit coming through people who in many other church settings would never be sent into such pioneering responsibilities.

From prison to missions...

Some of the church planters are people coming right out of the rehab center into mission work. (Beginning church planters are called "missioners.") Former criminals and drug addicts recently out of prison are now opening churches. We met with and prayed over such a team this week, which will leave for western Ukraine next week. Perhaps 35 years of prison are among them. The leader of the team was a pastor while in prison, so he is used to preaching. The others are just beginning to preach. All of them are being sent right from the church rehab program -- which is very intense, and includes Bible training and evangelism.

Gregory says it this way: Believers coming out of prison are some of the best ministers — you can throw them anywhere! They would go to hell and back for the gospel! As a result, many of them make great village church planters. They are ready for anything, so happy to be saved and have a new life in Christ! Problems? Yes. Fruit? Abundant.

The need for "water-ers" to join the "planters"...

This has rekindled the concern in us that we had when we first came to Ukraine. It became very clear: it is one thing to open churches; it is another thing to build them.

It is one thing to bring people to salvation. It is another thing to teach and disciple them.

We will never be able to get to most of these village churches ourselves to teach them the Word of God. There are too many of them, and it is very inconvenient for the villagers to host us anyway.

The Ukrainians themselves must teach and disciple the new churches. That is why there is Bible College here, to teach those who can teach others.

Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 3:6, *"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase."* There is a movement of planters here. There must also be a movement of "water-ers". Will you pray with us that the teaching and discipling ministries (the water-ers) will be mobilized here to build up these new churches?

Right now, I think the "water-ers" don't know who they are and how important they are. It is the planters who are on the front lines, and other kinds of people feel "second-class".

Actually, that is how Jackie and I see ourselves here: as "water-ers" -- standing beside the planting pioneers, to teach and encourage the churches and leaders. Pray with us for the teaching ministries here to be recognized and ready to go.

Ten-year celebration of the Church of Praise...

Tomorrow the main church will celebrate its ten-year anniversary! It will be a joy to celebrate with them, having been coming here since the work began. Busloads of people will come from daughter churches, including many people from new village churches. It will go on all day. Following the celebration, there will be another pastors' conference. Then we'll head home. We'll report on these events next time.

Thank You!!!

You are an important part of our lives, and even though our trust is in the Lord, we know that we cannot really do anything without the support of friends like you who receive our prayer letter. You might think your prayer is not so important, but we have learned that one simple prayer can change a situation, even in another part of the world.

Within the circle of those who pray for us are those who support our ministry financially. Perhaps you are one of them. How could we ever express enough appreciation for the gifts that come? We know each gift is given to the Lord, and we receive them all as stewards of the Lord's money.

Do we need more? Yes, lots more. *Jehovah Jireh!!*

Thank you for your friendship, for praying for us, and giving as the Lord leads you.

With love,

John and Jackie