

PARTNERS IN MISSIONS

Training National Leaders for "Ministry"

 **Odessa Missions**

Training National Leaders for "Missions"



Muslim children sing "Jesus Loves Me" in English:

In Uganda, children are everywhere, and the school system is overwhelmed. This opens the door for church workers who are willing to teach Vacation Bible School and camp songs to children in English. Our students could spend every day teaching Bible lessons and church songs in different schools. Many classes are held outside and I watched as non-school children gathered and stared over the fences as my former students used flannel-graphs to teach Bible stories to Muslim children. Many of the refugees from South Sudan come from Muslim families. When Christians welcome a Muslim refugee fleeing war, in the name of Jesus, ... they have earned the right to teach their children, "Jesus Loves Me, this I know,..." I visited with one Muslim family who was sending their daughter to the church youth meeting for Bible study. Our students from Ukraine are making a difference in Uganda.



Language: You must speak English. Black Africans look the same to me, ... but they are not. There are 64 different tribes in South Sudan and many others in Uganda, ... and yes, people know which tribe they belong to. This often means speaking a completely different language. Galya's husband speaks more than four languages, but often could not find a common language to speak to people in rural villages. English – yes English, is the common language in Uganda. It is the essential language for operating the medical clinic. English is not the first language of most people, but they all recognize it is the most common language for communication. This is a problem for our students from Ukraine. The three students who are working long-term, have learned English after arriving in Uganda. If we bring future students to Uganda, we will insist they spend the first three months living in a dorm with Africans and completing the three-month intensive program in English. We were very excited for an invitation for future students to study in the "English for Ministry" program.

We remain in the States and school remains closed in Ukraine: Following my return from Uganda, most international flights were suspended. The borders of Ukraine and the US are closed. We are in the States with return tickets, but waiting for the borders to reopen. We will take this opportunity to devote the March, April, and May newsletters to our mission students work and the mission opportunities we see emerging in Ukraine.

We receive regular updates from the US Embassy about the situation in Ukraine. Regina, our daughter in Ukraine, also keeps us informed about how Ukraine is under a more restrictive national lockdown than the US. The Bible college remains closed with only a few classes being taught on-line. We remain in close contact with the Bible college and continue to do much of the office work that we would be able to do if we were physically in Ukraine.

We have return flights booked for May 13th and pray that the global travel situation will allow our return on this date. As we "shelter in place," that place for us is Corinth, MS. We continue to stay with Ray's parents as we work on-line with our colleges in Ukraine and our mission students.

A theological question: The second location for the regional church conference was remote. The internet says that 4% of the roads in Uganda are paved. We were not on one of those rare 4%, and I was motion sick by the time we arrived. I was outside leaning up against the side of the building when I was called in to preach. Following my time to speak, I returned outside to find a cool place under a tree. A common feature of this type of meeting is Q&A. The question was, *"What if you find out that your second wife is trying to poison you, by using witchcraft and black magic?"* By "second wife" he did not mean that he was divorced, but that he had more than one current wife, and that wife #2 was the one who was trying to kill him. My advice was, "Any time your wife is trying to poison you, ... you need to become a better husband."



The road to church

Ukrainian mission student teaching in school

Ray speaking in churches in Mississippi

Wooden Xylophone in church

Ray speaking at regional conference

Children eat rice in church

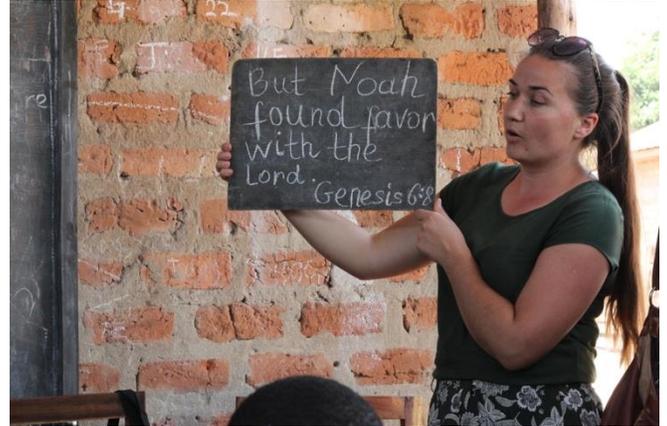


Recommendation: Part of the purpose of my trip to Uganda, was to make recommendations for how our mission program might prepare more Ukrainian students to work in Uganda. In short, I will recommend that the mission students we enroll for this next school year, will all make a commitment to completing their internship in Uganda. We will begin our studies in Odessa as usual, then fly the entire group (about 10) to Uganda for three months of intensive language study. This will be followed by a couple more weeks of class at the Uganda Bible college, then the entire group will move to the area where our current students are working. This is the area near the South Sudan refugee camp. Our Ukrainian mission director would travel with our students and also study English for three months. He would return and Regina would join our students and work in the health clinic delivering babies for a few weeks. I would possibly join them for the last portion of their internship. We need your prayers. This is an ambitious goal and one that involves some extra cost. On two occasions, we have had American students study in our program. Pray about those possibilities.

Mission Program: Jesus tells his Church that the harvest is both plentiful and ripe. Now is the time, ... today is the day. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Odessa Theological Seminary has trained well over two thousand workers for God's Kingdom. As an educational institution, most of these efforts have rightly been focused on training national leaders for ministry within traditional Slavic culture. Pam and I went to Ukraine in 1995 with the commitment to *"Train National Leaders for Ministry."* Initially this meant training the people of Ukraine and Russia for ministry in Russian speaking churches. But the question remains, ***"What about the millions of non-Russians in the former Soviet Union?"*** Doesn't the phrase, "for God so loved the world," include them as well? Are they not also part of Jesus's Great Commission for his global church?

During the Soviet period, one method of restricting Christianity was to not allow missionary activity outside the walls of existing congregations, to not allow the training of workers for missionary activity, and to not allow the creation of mission organizations for sending missionaries. As a result of the Soviet experience, when the churches of Ukraine and Russia emerged with new religious freedoms in the early 1990's, they did so without missionaries, mission organizations, or theological schools for training missionaries. The idea of sending "foreign," or cross-cultural missionaries was simply absent in the churches of Russia and Ukraine. During the past 25 years a number of factors have changed within Russia and Ukraine, including a decrease in the number of foreign missionaries, as well as an increased in the desire by Ukrainians to send their own people as missionaries.

In 2008 the Bible college in Odessa began the first cross-cultural missionary training program for Ukrainians. Ethnic Ukrainians and Russians are free to travel into "restricted" parts of the former Soviet Union and have opportunities that are not available to western missionaries. The cost for Ukrainians serving as missionaries is often a fraction of the cost of western missionaries. The Bible college in Odessa finds itself uniquely positioned to meet a rising desire by Ukrainian and Russian Christians to train and send their own national missionaries.



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