

# PARTNERS IN MISSIONS

Training National Leaders for "Ministry"

Ray and Pam  
Trantham

 **Odessa Missions**  
Training National Leaders for "Missions"



**Back in Ukraine:** During the holidays, we flew to the States to update churches about the work in Ukraine. Because of a visit with mission students in Uganda during February, we planned to stay a little longer than normal. Because of COVID-19, that turned into a long stay and multiple delays in rescheduling our return flight. We were excited to finally be able to return to Ukraine, in early July. Now, a month back in Ukraine, we have faced many difficulties. We were glad to have a return flight, ... but it was obvious, the other people on the plane were not traveling for business or pleasure, ... they too, had to get back. We wrote last month, "If we are "stuck" somewhere, it is best as a missionary to be stuck on the mission field, instead of stuck at home." Given the current travel situations, we are considering what is the best way to update American churches, about the mission work in Ukraine, while adapting to a changing world with uncertain travel arrangements.

**Different:** Now that we are back, Ukraine is different than when we left. We were first told that two ministers that we work with, and who have offices in the same building as me, were in the hospital. A month later, one is still in the hospital with COVID-19 and the other has been sent home for recovery. The usual crowded streets and markets, have fewer people, and travel and ministry is restricted. The government has mandated the wearing of mask in all public spaces. This is accomplished by imposing fines upon businesses and organizations that do not enforce the policy of wearing mask. We went to a large store to do some grocery shopping, and the first thing inside the door was a vending machine selling masks.

**Travel advisory:** We receive occasional travel advisories from the American Embassy. Most of the time they are warnings to stay away from protest and be cautious as foreigners. But today, we received three separate travel warnings from the US Embassy. They began as follows;

*"Global Health Advisory: Do Not Travel. Avoid all international travel due to the global impact of COVID-19. Reconsider travel to Ukraine due to COVID-19. Exercise increased caution due to crime and civil unrest. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued a Level 3 Travel Health Notice for Ukraine due to COVID-19."*

We live in a world that is broken by sin. We live in a world that is in need of hope. The task of the Church in the world is to be a light that shines in the darkness. We thank you for your participation with us in being that light in a world that needs what Christ offers.

**Mission student update:** All but two of our mission students have been able to return to Ukraine. One student is still in Uganda because flights have not resumed between Ukraine and Uganda, and another student is in Kenya. Alyonah, could return from Kenya, but has chosen to extend her internship until September. When we visited with her in February, she was having some difficulties, but has since found her place in the culture and has chosen to extend her stay by two months. (Three former students choose to remain in Uganda on long term assignments.) We continue to make plans for this year's group of mission students to focus on Uganda. We have been interviewing potential students and making plans, ... while we wait on the Ukrainian government's decision concerning classes for this fall.



Regular mask 50 cents, and fancy mask are \$2

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**Counting the cost:** Aleksey was a persistent student who often stayed around after class or during break to continue to ask questions. A few days after our return to Ukraine, we learned that his body had been found in Kiev under suspicious circumstances. I will share with you what Ukrainian Christians wrote of him:

*Today is an awful day. We got the message that a volunteer and social worker, was found dead. All who knew Aleksey were praying, hoping, and waiting that things would turn out differently. There are substantial reasons to suppose that he was killed, and that this was related to Aleksey's ministry.*

*Aleksey founded and lead the NGO "The House of Mercy," which focused on helping homeless people return to normal life. According to his colleagues, Aleksey had recently been involved in investigating human trafficking, of children and orphan girls. Members of his ministry team had recently been threatened by the criminals who exploit homeless people. According to preliminary police report, Aleksey's death was "due to natural causes." His friends and colleagues doubt these findings and point out several inconsistencies indicating foul play.*

*I got to know Aleksey during his studies at Odesa Theological Seminary. It is rare for a male student to enter the Christian Education program. During the entrance exams, we asked Aleksey if he really wanted to study in this program. He was adamant in his commitment to this area of study and ministry. He was one of the few students who completed the program without any shortcomings, even though he was studying part-time. He always was an interesting and attentive student and was supportive of others.*

*Aleksey had a difficult life before his conversion, but God had freed him from his addictions and given him a new life. This is part of the reason that he was so passionate about the rehab ministry. Even though it was a hard and exhausting ministry, everyone could see that Aleksey was applying what he had learned to his ministry. He was also not afraid to ask for advice and support.*

*Our college president writes: Shortly before Aleksey's graduation in 2015, he shared with me the dreams he had for the future. In 2016, he began to organize the NGO "The House of Mercy." He took the things that he had learned and applied them to his situation. There were others involved with him, but he was certainly the visionary of the ministry. His courage and persistence amazed me. I spoke with him last winter and he agreed to share some of his successes and failures as a way to encourage other students. Unfortunately, we never got around to that ... I will always remember Aleksey as a courageous, loving, modest and consistent brother in Christ, and as a true Christian. I mourn with Aleksey's relatives, friends and colleagues and pray to our merciful Lord for his wife Lena and his new-born daughter Emma.*



Aleksey Kuchapin

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