

PARTNERS IN MISSIONS

Training National Leaders for "Ministry"

Ray and Pam
Trantham

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

2020 in Ukraine:

During the 25 years that our family has lived in Ukraine, life on this side of the ocean has always been different than what we left behind in America. At the beginning of this year, we were delayed in our return to Ukraine because of the emerging coronavirus. We were anxious to get back to our home in Ukraine and to the ministry of training national leaders for ministry. We were anxious to get back to the familiar routine of missionary work in Ukraine. We are still waiting for the return of that familiar situation that we had grown accustomed to in Ukraine.

Flying back to Ukraine was more difficult than in the past, and before we left the airport we were signed up for the government imposed isolation and tracking program. When we were allowed to leave our house, two weeks later, we noticed few people actually wearing the required mask. All businesses had signs expressly forbidding entry without a mask, but enforcement was minimal. Masks were supposedly mandatory on public transportation, but as busses passed, we saw the usual packed busses with un-masked passengers. Pam and I have completely avoided public transportation. Our Bible college opened with a reduced number of students in September, and it was "said" that we should all wear masks.

As the weather began to get cool and people came indoors, things changed. The number of coronavirus infections increased and attitudes on the street changed. Our Bible college soon switched from in person classes, to on-line classes. The Ukrainian government responded to rising cases of the virus by once again closing its borders. The government tried a "weekend shutdown" where businesses were closed on Saturday and Sunday and people were asked to stay at home, but this was concluded to be ineffective. For many weeks, Pam and I were the only ones at church wearing a mask.

As the virus situation began to change, Pam and I made the decision not to make our usual trip to America over the winter break to update supporting churches. We feared the risk of a long international flight, as well as being delayed in our return to Ukraine because of travel restrictions. At first, we were unsure if we had made the right decision to stay in Ukraine. Over the past six weeks, as the number of people infected by the coronavirus has increased worldwide, we have been reassured that we are more effective in ministry by staying in Ukraine.

The past six weeks have been significantly different than a few months ago. Today, everyone wears a mask in church. One Sunday, I remember seeing an elderly grandmother walking around, passing out masks to anyone who didn't have theirs on. Employees are still working at our Bible college, but the number of people is significantly reduced. I have chosen

The newsletters for December, January, and February will follow a similar layout and share related articles about the current situation in Ukraine, as well as pictures that reflect back over this past year of ministry.



Family in States last Christmas



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Tax-deductible contributions:

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to eat in my office for the past two weeks, instead of the cafeteria where there are only two chairs to each table. Classes continue on-line. Many conferences and church activities have been canceled. Our Ukrainian teachers often teach at other Bible colleges and we often rely on visiting teachers, but this process of teacher exchange is now rare.

During 2020, three of the top Google searches in Ukraine have been: Coronavirus, Google Classroom, and Zoom. Google Classroom is the most popular platform for delivering on-line course material and Zoom is the preferred method for meeting with students. This is true for our college as well as for the secular school system. The public schools, like our Bible college, initially started with face-to-face classes. They have switched back and forth, between in person classes and on-line, but have recently switched to on-line only. Our granddaughter, Emily, is in the fifth grade and it has not been known from week-to-week if she would be at school or studying at home. Evelyn is in kindergarten, and the government policy has been to continue to operate elementary school with in person classes.

People with COVID:

I am tired of hearing about COVID, and I am tired of talking about COVID. Because of this, I have avoided writing about COVID. The following are thirteen people associated with our Bible college who have, or have had the coronavirus. I have listed them in the order they have become sick. The last four are still recovering and need your prayers.

- **Vladimir** is the former president of our Bible college and spent several weeks in the hospital with the virus.
 - **Aleksandr** is the regional coordinator for church planting in Odessa. His office is next to mine.
 - **Vitalii** is my Ukrainian counterpart. Together we oversee the mission training program. He was sick for almost 8 weeks.
 - **Slava** is the Old Testament professor. His wife is an administrative secretary.
 - **Tonya** works in the administration building. She is a member of our church and her husband is the choir director.
 - **Charley** is an American teacher and board member of our Bible college. He chose to return to the States because of underlying health issues. Immediately following their international flight, he and his wife both tested positive.
 - **Natasha** is the academic secretary. Her office is one floor up, directly over mine.
 - **Dima** is the college librarian. He is a former student and lives on our campus with his wife.
 - Two weeks ago I received an email requesting urgent prayer for **Sergey**. The next day, he died from coronavirus. Sergey was the Ukrainian church leader that I traveled to Uganda with in February. He had been on a mission trip to Pakistan, where he contracted the coronavirus and died soon after returning to Ukraine.
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- **Angela** is Andrey's wife. Andrey teaches Christian Education and his wife is one of Regina's best friends. *(still recovering)*
 - **Victor** is the minister at our church. He is a former student and works in an administrative position at our college. *(still recovering)*
 - Two days ago, our son-in-law, **Sasha**, was confirmed to have coronavirus. He was eating in our college cafeteria when he noticed he was feeling sick and thought he had a fever. He went home and after spending several days in bed, ... he tested positive. *(still recovering)*
 - As I was writing this, I receive a text from Vitalii asking for prayer for his **parents**. His father is a top church leader and chairman of the board of trustees for our Bible college. *(still recovering)*



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