

PARTNERS IN MISSIONS

Training National Leaders for "Ministry"

Ray and Pam
Trantham

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



Ukraine braces for conflict: Over the past few days, we have received countless emails and phone calls regarding our safety and the situation in Ukraine. Pam and I arrived in Mississippi just before Christmas and originally planned to stay through February. Regina, Sasha, and grandchildren remain in Odessa. We are in constant communication with our family and friends in Ukraine. Everyone is safe and Pam and I are weighing our options for delaying our return to Ukraine. We wanted to write to you, let you know our family is safe, and share with you our perspective on the threat of a Russian invasion.

(It is important to realize that we are writing on January 26th, and the situation is rapidly changing.)

Message to US Citizens: *"The U.S. Embassy urges U.S. citizens in Ukraine to consider departing now using commercial or other privately available transportation options."* This was the latest of a long list of messages from the U.S. Embassy to Americans in Ukraine. We take these warnings seriously. Some mission organizations have required the complete evacuation of their missionaries from Ukraine, while other organizations are allowing evacuation decisions to be made on a case-by-case basis.

A short history: The Soviet Union broke into 15 independent countries in 1991. Many of these countries, like Ukraine, no longer wanted to be bound to "Russia." At the time, Russia was weak and had little influence over its former territories. The West, Europe, and NATO used this opportunity to extend its influence over parts of the former Soviet Union. Over the past ten years, Russia has regained its strength and is now hoping to regain its influence in the region. Russia would like for Ukraine to once again, serve as a buffer-state between Russia and Europe. Many feel that Russia wants "influence over" Ukraine and its future.

A continuing conflict: In 2014, Russia annexed the part of Ukraine called "Crimea." At the same time, Russia backed an internal conflict along its border with Ukraine. This conflict has been ongoing for the past seven years, and approximately 14,000 people have lost their lives. This conflict has resulted in Ukraine turning further away from Russia and more towards Europe. This situation reached a turning point a few months ago when Russia began to mass many thousands of troops along Ukraine's border.

A new threat: Prior to the end of 2021, there was an ongoing low-level conflict on the border between Russia and Ukraine. This conflict was a few hours away from our home in Odessa and had little impact on our daily life. We knew it was unsafe for Americans to travel to this conflict area or to Crimea. Churches and missionary activity were also persecuted in these Russian controlled areas. Many Christians had fled these conflict areas and resettled in Odessa and other stable areas of Ukraine. At the end of 2021, Russia began to mass thousands of new troops along the border. This was an obvious change, and to everyone, this looked like a planned invasion.

We are missionaries: Our purpose in being in Ukraine is to proclaim the gospel. The "political" and "economic" conditions of Ukraine have an impact on our ability to proclaim the gospel, but we choose not to be involved in those areas. We are missionaries and our sole purpose in being in Ukraine is related to the proclamation of the gospel. Ukraine is currently facing a very serious political crisis. Ukrainians are facing the loss of political freedom and national sovereignty. We feel the current crisis has the potential to negatively impact the lives of average Ukrainians and to negatively impact the proclamation of the gospel.

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Missionaries in Odessa, Ukraine since 1995.

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In the parts of Ukraine that Russia has controlled for the past seven years, missionaries have had to leave, and churches have been closed. Russian involvement has been bad for the spread of the gospel.

Odessa is a target: Our home is in the port city of Odessa, and the location of our Bible college. Odessa is one of the most likely targets for Russian military activity. We are a Russian speaking city, close to Crimea, and a vital economic center. We are also a key crossroads between other "Russian" areas.

What happens if? No one knows what will happen, but Ukraine will not be the determining factor in what happens. Russia has the military power to do as it pleases. Europe and the United States can offer little resistance but are working to impose economic cost on Russia. If there is military action, Americans would be at risk. Americans should evacuate before any conflict begins. Ultimately God is in control.

Be prepared: What does it mean to be prepared? Our daughter and her Ukrainian husband are currently living in Odessa. We are in contact with them several times a day. Pam and I happen to be in America today, but if we were in Ukraine, we would be doing the same things Regina and Sasha are doing. They have already collected all the house documents, and other important documents, along with available cash. The car is filled with gas and suitcases are packed. The house has been stocked with non-perishable food items in case there are blockades or shortages. If there is a need to evacuate, the first option would be to drive 15 hours to western Ukraine, where they would stay with friends. If the situation worsened, it would be possible to drive across the Polish border and on to Germany.

What we think: Today, (January 26th) we are waiting and praying. We know that if we were in Ukraine during a Russian invasion, that we would be a liability. We know that the Bible college would not be able to operate and would be a target. We know that we would have to evacuate from Odessa and would be a burden upon friends in western Ukraine. We currently have a young married couple, from the church, staying in our house. We are very concerned about our home, our church, and the Bible college. There is little we could contribute to the situation by being in Odessa at this time.

A light of hope: This morning, I opened the email from the U.S. Embassy, and then I opened an email from Luda. Luda is one of my mission students in Uganda, and she reminded us why we are missionaries. Luda wrote about sharing the gospel with her neighbor: "Our neighbor, is now interested in Bible studies. She is a single mother of three, age 35, and raising three children from her labors in a field. A few months ago, I helped her in the garden and was able to share the gospel with her. She accepted Christ and now wants to read and study the Bible together. She needed someone who could explain what was written. That's how we started the New Life in Christ course with her. Fortunately, she can read and write. How touching it is to see tears in her eyes when she understands the truth about Christ and God's plan of salvation."



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