

# PARTNERS IN MISSIONS

*Training National Leaders for "Ministry"*

Ray and Pam  
Trantham

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



**Reflecting over the past four months:** The situation was already tense on the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, but a full-scale Russian invasion was still unexpected. For the past eight years our family had lived in Ukraine with an ongoing conflict that had already cost some 14,000 lives. We had grown accustomed to seeing military hardware on the road and dealing with refugees from just a few hours away. This eight-year-old conflict no longer made the American news, and rarely impacted our lives in Odessa. We still kept "documents and cash" packed and ready to grab if we needed to flee, but that had all become "normal." Four months ago, the conflict went from being isolated, to being national, or even global. All international flights were suspended, roads and trains were packed as everyone headed for the western borders.

Pam and I were already in the States reporting to supporting churches, when our attention quickly turned to what we could do to help provide safety to our Bible college faculty and students. We were overwhelmed as churches and individuals began to respond to our appeals to help those in need. No one has been able to explain why, or understand the intended outcome desired by Putin. We have all watched the senseless carnage reported each day by the international media. The world expected the conflict to end in a few days. In March, I wrote that within three months, we should have a good picture of when we would be able to return. That three months has come and gone, and heavy fighting continues. We are however, beginning to see some "likely" outcomes for this conflict.

**Busy:** The conflict began as we were packing our bags to return to Ukraine. We had spent two months reporting to churches and were returning to the Bible college in Ukraine. Overnight, our ministry went from "Training national leaders for ministry", to trying to secure the safety of those we had trained over the past years. For the first three weeks of the war, my phone and computer "dinged" constantly during the night as we received texts and posts from Ukraine. We would wake up early to respond, and then the morning would be filled with messages from individuals, organizations, and churches wanting to help. March and April were some of the busiest months in our 27 years as missionaries. People have often said that God had us where he wanted us during this crisis. Our hearts have certainly longed for Ukraine, but we feel that we have been able to accomplish a tremendous amount of good over the past four months.

Today our immediate task is:

*"Working to preserve the ministry we have built over the past 27 years,  
by preserving the people we have trained and their ability to continue in ministry."*

**I feel bad about not doing my job:** Our job as missionaries is to be in Ukraine training local leaders. Even though the Bible college is closed, there are things we feel that we could do in Odessa. In our mind, we know that we have been able to accomplish more by being in America, than we would have if we had been in Ukraine. I often remember that the Apostle Paul spent two years of his missionary service in jail. Pam and I want to thank you for your continuing support of our ministry. We want to assure you that our plan is to return to missionary service in Ukraine when possible. At this time, we are convinced that we are best able to serve Ukraine, by being in America. We continue to be regularly engaged with the faculty and staff of the college, as well as with students. Our unique situation continues to allow us to serve the people of Ukraine in ways that we could not from inside of Ukraine.

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**Where are we:** People constantly ask if our family is safe.

- Sasha remains in Odessa, Ukraine
- Regina and daughters are in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.
- Ray and Pam are in Corinth, Mississippi.

Regina is in Hattiesburg because her sister lives there and several of their supporting churches are in that area. Ray's parents still live in Corinth, and we are able to provide some assistance as they age. Electricity and internet continue to function in the city of Odessa, which allows us to keep in contact. A young couple from the church is living in our house. The Bible college campus remains undamaged. Many faculty and staff have evacuated to western Ukraine, while long-term Odessa residents have remained. Those remaining are taking turns "guarding" the campus. There is no educational activity on the campus, however the facilities are used for humanitarian distribution. (Many women and children have left the country.)

**Crisis fund and humanitarian support:** In late February, a few days before Russia invaded, we ask for help in relocating our Bible college faculty and staff to safer locations. You responded with overwhelming generosity. Our attention then turned to assisting other Christians in Odessa. Regina and daughters left Ukraine, while Sasha stayed behind and helped manage humanitarian relief and evacuation. We continue to be able to transfer funds to Sasha in Odessa, who is then able to assist with food, transportation, and medical needs. By April we turned our attention to the Ukrainians we had trained as cross-cultural missionaries. These are Ukrainians, who were being supported as missionaries, by local Ukrainian churches. Many of these Ukrainian missionaries, found themselves suddenly cut off from the support they had been receiving from Ukrainian churches. Some of them found themselves stranded in foreign countries with no mission support and no way to return. We now have a list of 20 Ukrainian missionaries which we are helping to continue their ministry. Some of them are continuing to minister in foreign countries, while others have returned to serve in Ukraine or to work with refugees in neighboring countries. These are Ukrainian workers that you have helped train for ministry, and that you are now helping to carry out ministry in a crisis situation. It is our opinion that this is one of the most productive and cost-effective uses of mission funds at the present time. Usually students write and say "thank-you" for the support received, but Genya and Sasha wrote and said "**No** thank-you." They said they still had a job and that the money should be sent to someone else who needed it more. We thank God for people like this.

Just a few months ago, I would have never imagined reporting a "bullet proof vest" as a ministry expense. This past month, I was reading over a financial report from mission students and was surprised to notice one of the expense items was a bullet proof vest. After making sure his wife and two children were safely out of Ukraine, Vitalii is now transporting medicine and food to besieged areas of Ukraine. Vitalii is not in the army but works closely with Christians serving in the army to provide them with medical supplies. Regina recently helped provide Vitalii with medical supplies requested by Christian soldiers. These were specialty supplies donated in the US, flown to Moldova, and then driven across the border. It is common for area churches to send food and supplies to their church members serving in the army. Sasha has been purchasing meat which is prepared in area churches and then delivered to Ukrainian soldiers. Sasha has also been housing refugees who are passing through Odessa. This problem occurs when areas near Odessa come under attack and the residents flee these areas. These are the people who "pass through" Odessa on their way to a safer area.



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**Our assessment of the current situation:** Our purpose for 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. Ukrainians are facing great losses, and this makes mission work both "more difficult," as well as "more necessary." 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. The city of Odessa remains under Ukrainian control but is the next major city as Russia tries to form a "land bridge" linking Russian controlled areas.

In our March newsletter we said that it would be at least three months before we could make a "guess" about the future. We expected that by June, the conflict would have ended, and things would be settling down. That has not happened. Many analysts predict the war will continue for the next several months, ... then be followed by a "negotiation" which results in Russian continuing to control part of Ukraine's territory.

In the early days of the war, most people expected the conflict to be limited to the eastern part of Ukraine, bordering Russia. This did not happen. Russia has demonstrated its ability and willingness to hit any part of Ukraine. However, during the past month, most conflict has been focused on the eastern part of Ukraine, bordering Russia. The city of Odessa is located at the very edge of this area and has not seen "Russian troops." From the beginning, strategic targets in Odessa have been hit by Russian missiles. This has included the bombing of the airport, transportation hubs, fuel storage areas, and logistics hubs. This also included missile strikes on a shopping mall and KFC. (That's right, the new Kentucky Fried Chicken was hit.)

Many of the women and children from our Bible college evacuated in March. Although fighting has not taken place in Odessa, air raid sirens and explosions are regular, and the city remains unsafe. Checkpoints and curfews remain as Odessa has prepared to fend off a sea invasion. The area around Odessa is a rich agricultural area, but some imported food items are in limited supply. The greatest shortage is that of fuel. Fuel is rationed and there is a long line when it is available. Analysts predict that Ukraine's GDP will drop by 45-50% this year. It is estimated that only about half of the businesses in Ukraine remain operational.

**Our assessment of the future:** The biblical author often asks, "How long O' Lord?" God does not answer this question, but instead promises to be with us. No one expected or can explain the things that have happened in Ukraine, but we know that God is still with us and that he continues to want the gospel proclaimed in Ukraine. As I said earlier, many analysts predict a "negotiated" settlement that allows Russia to continue to control parts of eastern and southern Ukraine. The most important question for us is, "Who will control the city of Odessa?" At present, Ukraine continues to control this major port city.

It is important to remember that for the past eight years, Ukraine has continued to fight for the control of its occupied territory bordering Russia. No one believes that after suffering such devastation, Ukraine will agree to give up more territory. When Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, the international community took action to "restrict" Russian aggression, but not to reverse that aggression. The weapons the international community has provided Ukraine during the past four months have served to "restrict" Russian aggression inside of Ukraine. The international community has been willing to accept an ongoing limited conflict between Russia and its neighbors for the past several years. My fear is that this limited conflict, inside of Ukraine, may be tolerated by international leaders into the future.

We pray for peace in Ukraine. As we look at the future, it is important to remember that our family has been serving as missionaries in a country that has been at war with Russia for the past eight years. We would not be able to do our ministry in a Russian controlled city, but if Odessa remains under Ukrainian control, we will return as soon as possible. We are already exploring the "possibility" of flying into a neighboring country and crossing over to Odessa for a few weeks. This would first be a limited trip, in preparation for a longer trip. For the past 27 years our calling has been to *"Train national leaders for ministry."* We do not know the future, but we are committed to future ministry in Ukraine. While we work towards that future, we continue to work remotely with students and faculty. Ukraine needs missionaries more than ever. We thank you for being partners with us in this ministry.

