

PARTNERS IN MISSIONS

Training National Leaders for "Ministry"

Ray and Pam Trantham

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Odessa Missions

Training National Leaders for "Missions"



Bomb-shelter and Air-raid: The number of air-raid alerts has definitely increased during the past months. Russia launches a lot more explosive Iranian drones into Ukraine. They have done this throughout the war, but the number is much greater now. Ukraine has gotten better at shooting them down, but they still fall out of the sky and land somewhere. In the past our area had a couple of air-raid warnings each week, ... now we have a couple of warnings each day. Missiles are larger, more accurate, and more difficult to shoot down than drones. They also cost about a hundred times as much as a drone and require western military equipment to defend against. During my last trip to Ukraine, I stayed at the Bible college instead of at my house. My room was directly above the bomb-shelter located in the basement. When we visited a school to deliver Christmas candy, the first thing I noticed, was the sign for the bomb-shelter. When I was in the hospital, immediately following my surgery, the nurse said, "There is an air-raid, do you want to stay in your hospital room or go to the bomb-shelter?" (I stayed in my room.)



Bomb shelter below by room

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Air-raid at church: Our church had an additional service on Christmas Day. The service was very meaningful and moving. As the sermon was finishing and the invitation was beginning, the air-raid siren began to sound. (You can't miss it.) No one got up and no one moved. The service continued, but there was a sense of nervousness. As we began to sing the invitation song, I was struck by how the warning of an incoming attack, drove home the need to have a Savior. A young woman walked up the aisle in tears to give her life to Christ.



Public school: In the past it was common to see large numbers of youth riding public busses in the morning to go to the colleges in the center of the city, then return in the afternoon. This is no longer the case. Regina explained that people who attend in-person classes, only do so on a limited basis, for a few days a week, and only for a few hours. This is not just true for college students, but from kindergarten through high school as well. On-line classes are not as developed but have become the only option for many. Because of the decline in public education, Regina and Sasha have chosen to homeschool their children for now. Our Bible college still offers in-person classes, but they are in



Public school located in metro station.

concentrated week-long sessions. Students come for intense lectures from morning to evening, and then do homework and other assignments during the following weeks.

Checkpoints: Military checkpoints exist throughout Ukraine. There is a checkpoint on a major road leaving Odessa, just 160 steps from our house, and within sight of the Bible college. This has been in place since the beginning of the war. I walk past and am completely ignored, never being stopped or asked for documents, ... but for those who are driving it is a different story. The level of screening varies with the changing security situation. Checkpoints are also a location where people can be issued draft notices, so for some people there is always a sense of uneasiness. When Regina and I visited Sasha's village we had to pass through a checkpoint on the edge of Ukraine's border. (This is why Sasha is not allowed to travel in this area.) We waited for an hour and a half to get through the checkpoint. As we drove along the sign said, "Do not stop, do not get out." There were guards standing along the side of the road to make sure people did not cross into Moldova illegally. As Americans, Regina and I have documents that exempted us from travel restrictions, but this is not true for many Ukrainians. This is a serious issue for our Bible college. Many of our students are not able to attend in-person classes because of actual travel restrictions, or the uncertainty of travel.

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Church and ministry: I have noticed the same difficulty in church as I saw in many other parts of Ukraine. There is a growing shortage of men. There are more elderly, but fewer young families in church. I teach classes in Church Growth, where I help students analyze and understand the situations in their church and develop plans to create a balanced, healthy, and productive church. We have long known that the "missing generation" is those people in their 40's and 50's. They grew up during the Soviet period, the period of atheism, and are the most unchurched of the population. Older generations have been returning to the church they remembered, and young people have been brought in through new Sunday school and youth programs.

During the past two years, something drastic has changed in the Ukrainian church. What if everyone between the age of 16 and 40 was taken out of your church? What impact would that have upon your church? The war has taken people between 16, and 40 out of the church. This has decimated the recent progress made in reaching the next generation. For the past 30 years, Odessa Theological Seminary, has spent about half of its time and energy in training youth workers and Sunday school teachers. This was not allowed during the Soviet period, and this represented one of the greatest opportunities to reach the next generation in Ukraine.

Partners In Missions, is engaged in training national leaders for ministry, ... and for almost 30 years, that has meant people coming to the Bible college, and sitting in my classroom, ... so that they could do ministry in the local church. Ukraine has been operating under martial law, since Russia launched a full-scale invasion, over two years ago on February 24th. This means that men between age 18 and 60, including our son-in-law, cannot leave the country and can be called upon at any time to serve in military service.

First – This means that boys, age 16 and 17 are buying one-way tickets out of Ukraine, ... because they know that on their 18th birthday, they will be receiving an army uniform for their birthday. So, they are gone. Second – Married women, ... especially with children are leaving for safety reasons. Eight million people, mostly women and children, have left Ukraine. So, they too are out of the church. Third – Every time a man ventures out into public, ... they run the very real possibility of being picked up and immediately taken to the army recruitment office. This is why I said, "The war has taken people between 16, and 40 out of the church."

So here is my question. If we have worked as missionaries for the past 30 years, to prepare this group of people, to do ministry in the local church, ... and the war has taken them out, ... what do we do as missionaries? Partners In Missions is committed to training national leaders for ministry. But how do we do this? Here is what Ukrainians said to me, ... **"We have to teach who we have, ... and we have to teach them where they are."** This door is open, and this is the future. That's not what we had in mind when we went to Ukraine 30 years ago, ... but that is what needs doing, ... so that is the work we are doing now. Because of the war, as Americans, we are taking a less public roll and a more supportive roll in the ministry. Remember to pray for workers in the church and for those studying at the Bible college.



It is rare for a missile to strike an apartment building in Odessa, but this occurred while I was there.

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