

PARTNERS IN MISSIONS

Training National Leaders for "Ministry"

Ray and Pam Trantham

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Odessa Missions

Training National Leaders for "Missions"

Trip Back to Ukraine: I returned to Ukraine three weeks ago, in preparation for classes to begin this fall. I returned with our daughter Regina, and two granddaughters. When I boarded the plane, the stewardess said she liked my shirt and asked if we were traveling to Hawaii. I said, "No, I just wore this bright flowery shirt to embarrass my daughter." It is important to laugh, ... the reality of the situation in Ukraine is one of increasing seriousness. The flight is always long and tiring, but was not out of the ordinary. The drive from the airport in Moldova across the Ukrainian border resulted in a long wait because of an unusually large number of people crossing the border. We were glad to get to Odessa and I was glad to be at the Bible college. I will be staying at the college because a Ukrainian teacher and his family are living in our house. When I arrived at the college, I decided to unpack my luggage in my office instead of the dormitory, because there is an air conditioner in my office. My office is already in the basement and is considered a "safe" location.

Air Raid Siren: I was tired after traveling, so I slept well. The first thing I noticed when I woke up was there was an air raid siren for our area. Russia launched some of the heaviest missile and drone attacks over the next four days. The next day, the discussion at lunch was, "Did you hear the explosions? – What was hit?" It was the electrical infrastructure that was targeted. Sasha's brother lives in the center of town, about ten miles away, and a power relay station next to their house was hit, resulting in explosions. This continued for four days and targeted major cities across Ukraine, resulting in several hundred strikes.

What happens when the electrical infrastructure is targeted: It had previously been reported that two and a half years of war had damaged 80% of the electrical grid in Ukraine. Power outages were already a regular occurrence and were predicted to increase during the winter. Outside of the building housing my office is the latest of our college's "four" generators. We are in the process of installing it in a secure location and connecting underground power cables. But what did this more recent attack mean for the already embattled public electrical grid? Ukraine is not answering this question, because they said they did not want to tell Russia how successful their attacks had been. But I can answer by saying, "My power is off." It is hard to say how much damage has been done to the power system, but it is definitely a lot. Even before the most recent attack, it was estimated that it would take Ukraine at least a year to repair its electrical infrastructure after the war ended. It is estimated that the electricity will be "off" more time than it is "on" during the winter. That is already the case in many areas.

- A friend told me at church today that some rural villages are completely without power.
- The city of Odessa is a densely packed city of a million people. When the traffic lights stop working, ... there is chaos.
- In residential areas of the city, most people are walking and taking busses. They are also trying to cross 4-6 lanes of traffic, in the dark, with no traffic lights.
- I was out on Saturday with Regina and Sasha while she waited in line for 30 minutes to get lunch. People who don't have power, want to buy something on the street for lunch.
- We stopped at the supermarket, and I noticed that huge amounts of meat had been moved outside and was being grilled and sold as "carry-out" at the front of the store. (People could not cook at home.)



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- We returned to Regina's house to eat the lunch we had bought on the street, ... and the water was off. Regina explained that normally houses don't lose water when the power is off, but those living in apartment buildings, also lose water when the electricity goes off.
- When I got back to the Bible college, I was glad my electricity was "on," so I put my groceries in my refrigerator. I first had to defrost the refrigerator to get everything in my freezer. As I finished defrosting and cleaning out the refrigerator, the power went off. Sasha said he could not keep the milk from spoiling because the refrigerator was off too often.



What is different than you expected? Five months ago, in April, Sasha insisted that Regina and the children travel to the States because of increased attacks in Odessa. Once back in Ukraine, I asked Regina what was different than what she expected. Without hesitation she said, "Life is much harder." It is not possible to do what you need to do, when you plan to do it. You cannot cook a meal when you plan. You cannot plan when to take a bath, if you don't have water. Your children cannot do their homeschooling if there is no electricity or internet. Regina described taking the girls to a church event 30 minutes away and getting home at 10:00 pm. There were no lights in the city, and she missed turns in her own neighborhood. She had to manually open her gate and garage door to get her car off the public street. This was all at 10:00 in complete

darkness. Electricity is normally "off" for three hours, then "on" for three hours, and then there is an "unknown" period of three hours, ... and then the cycle repeats.

Note: I do not mean to sound pessimistic. I reminded Regina that missionaries live in the jungle in Africa, and that our life in Ukraine thirty years ago was less technological than today. We are living in a situation that is unpredictable and needs continual adjustment. We thank you for your continual prayers and support. We serve a faithful God.

Too many rabbits: As we were driving to the Bible college, I commented on seeing a pheasant on the side of the road. The driver laughed and reminded me that there is a ban on all hunting in all of Ukraine. This has resulted in an overpopulation of all types of game animals. There is also a problem with "abandoned" domestic pets by internally displaced people.



What do others say? While I was waiting for the electricity to come back on, I walked over to the college president's office, just to visit. He was unfolding portable solar panels in his office and looking over his new "ECOFLOW DELTA Pro - Portable Power Station." Technology is available and in time solutions will be found to the day-to-day problems. I noticed in the local hardware store many rechargeable items and items that help with the current electrical issues. Casual conversations are less optimistic about the future of Ukraine's success in its struggle with Russia. There are more air raids than six months ago, but they cause less panic. What people pray for in church is a good indicator of what is on their mind. There is a lot of prayer that the war will soon come to an end.

Solar Panels: Regina and Sasha have spent the past several months exploring ways to improve the electrical situation at their home. They have come to conclude that the best long-term solution, is solar panels. This is also the most expensive solution. They have been talking with two different companies about installing solar panels and batteries which would provide electricity during most power outages.



Text message: I received the following text message from the government this morning during church, *"Contact with mines and ammunition is dangerous. Do not ignore warning signs and do not touch suspicious objects."* I was surprised to find that swimming is now allowed in the sea, ... as long as you stay away from the mines.

Baptisms: It is common for several churches in the community to have baptisms together. Today was one of those occasions. We had a number of guests from smaller area churches participating with us today. One lady came up to me and said, "I remember you and Pam from 25 years ago when Pam taught English at the other church." As we gathered for worship air raid sirens began to sound, ... no one responded. We had gathered to worship. We had gathered to celebrate our faith. We began with baptisms in our outdoor courtyard and then moved inside for a couple of sermons and congratulations of those who were baptized. Regina pointed out that two of those being baptized were from Sasha's youth group, and those who regularly meet at our house.



One of the sermons was from Galatians 3:26-27. *"So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."*

It is the practice of the church in Ukraine to have a time of public prayer for those who have been baptized. Church leaders pray over the new members and welcome them into the Family of God.



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