

PARTNERS IN MISSIONS

Training National Leaders for "Ministry"

Supporting and Developing National Leaders in "Ministry"

Ray and Pam Trantham ... missionaries to Ukraine since 1995.



January 3rd, 2025

Greetings from Ray and Pam,

For the past 30 years, you have faithfully supported our ministry in Ukraine, and we want to say "**Thank-You.**" We also want to keep you updated about the difficulties caused by the war in Ukraine, and about our plans for the future. You are indeed "**partners**" with us in this ministry. In short, our plans are to continue with the mission work in Ukraine, ... but we will need to make some ministry adjustments.

Three years ago, when Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, we were in Mississippi updating churches about the mission work. Our bags were packed, and we were planning to return to Ukraine in a few days. The war changed many things. For the past three years we have continued to serve the mission work in Ukraine. Sometimes this has been through helping with evacuation, relief and humanitarian aid, by working on-line, or by traveling back and forth for in-person classes. This has been a time of uncertainty.

As the fighting continued, it became clear that the situation was not going to be as it was before. God has continued to open new ministry opportunities and the work in Ukraine looks promising, ... but different. There continues to be many uncertainties about the future, but the need for missionaries in Ukraine remains. There is work to be done. There is an open door. We remain committed to the work.

We have spent the past year seeking God's guidance and trying to work out the best strategy to capitalize on the mission opportunities in Ukraine. We cannot say that we have the "perfect" solution, but we feel that it is important to share with you our plans and ask for your continuing prayers and support.

In the following three pages, we will share with you what we believe is God's calling and vision for the future.

We thank you for your continued "partnership in the gospel,"

Ray and Pam Trantham

Missionaries to Odessa, Ukraine since 1995

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Missionaries to Odessa, Ukraine since 1995.
ray@partnersinmissions.org <http://partnersinmissions.org>
Phone: 662-872-0748 662-643-1555

Tax-deductible contributions:
PARTNERS IN MISSIONS
P.O. Box 212
Fulton, MS 38843



A Continuing Commitment:

"Supporting and Developing National Leaders in Ministry"

Things are not the same as 30 years ago: We are not the same, the Bible college is not the same, and Ukraine is not the same. In 1995 we went to Ukraine to, *"Train National Leaders for Ministry"* - and we chose to do that at Odessa Theological Seminary. The Bible college shared our vision and plan, and we agreed to work together. Over the years, we have adapted and adjusted, while continuing to hold the same long-term goals. Today we are three years into the war, and it is clear the situation is very different than when we arrived in 1995. We continue to be involved with many of our long-time ministries, while constantly evaluating how we can assist with new ministry opportunities. That means we continue to support our projects, and make decisions about travel, teaching, and other opportunities as they arise.

The war changes things. The current situation is very different from 30 years ago, and in many ways, this makes Ukraine a completely different country. At age 62 and 67, we must consider that we too are different from when we arrived in Ukraine. We face challenges in the "new Ukraine," while continuing many of our original ministries. As the Apostle Paul aged; he wrote, visited, encouraged, and funded, those he had previously worked with, and this ongoing involvement seems appropriate for us as well.

Why did we go to Ukraine as missionaries? I have often returned to a quotation from our April 1995 newsletter, to explain why we went to Ukraine:

"The work in Odessa, Ukraine is presently needed because of the shortage of teachers in a newly established Bible College in Odessa. Before the time of Communism, there were large numbers of Christians in what is now the former Soviet Union who sought to go back to the Bible and just be the church of the New Testament. The Christian Church in North America had fellowship with them and personnel were exchanged in both directions. Most of our connections with our sister churches, called "Gospel Christians" or "Evangelical Christians" were lost during the time of Communism. Also, during the time of Communism, young men were not allowed to train for the ministry and Bible colleges were prohibited. With the new freedoms in the former Soviet Union, Odessa Bible College and Seminary was founded in 1989 as the first Bible college. This college was established by the "Evangelical Christians" who had survived Communism and who shared our Christian Church commitment to be the church of the New Testament. But what they needed, and what they ask us for, is teachers, for their college. This is the work the Tranthams will be doing."

Thirty years ago, we went to Ukraine to, *"Train National Leaders for Ministry."* We feel that we have been faithful to this task, ... but we also recognize changes have taken place over the past thirty years.

God has been faithful and has richly blessed our ministry over the years: When we look at the large number of people who have sat in our classroom, and the wide range of ministries they have carried out in Ukraine and around the world, ... we conclude that God has richly blessed our work in Ukraine. During our time as missionaries, most of our work has been with the Odessa Theological Seminary and Bible College. I am pleased to have taught and worked as a guest professor in six other Bible colleges in Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Uganda, and Kenya. During our time in Ukraine, we have produced 350 monthly newsletters and financial reports. We have spoken more than 300 times in American churches about the mission work in Ukraine.

When we decided to move our family to Ukraine in 1995, God's calling was clear and has been unwavering throughout the years. We have always known we were doing what God wanted us to do, and we have always felt his presence and blessing in our lives. Prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022, we repeatedly said that we intended to live out our days in Ukraine, while continuing to serve as missionaries.

Our world changed the morning of February 24th, 2022. Russia invaded Ukraine in a major escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian War, which began in 2014. Our work of teaching some 3,000 students over the past 30 years, was turned into a ministry of evacuation and humanitarian assistance. Many of those students are now serving in new ministries created by the war and we are continuing to help them do the work they were trained to do.

Of course, I still teach in-person classes in Odessa, but this is considerably more difficult because of the ongoing war. Since the beginning of the war, I have flown back and forth, for in-person classes. When I have face-to-face classes, only about half of our students can attend. The other students must take my classes on-line because they are unable to travel to Odessa. Even with these difficulties, God continues to bless the work of training national leaders for ministry in Ukraine.

We are working to empower the next generation for ministry: In 1995, when we sold our house in Mississippi and moved to Ukraine, our daughters were seven and nine years old. They both grew up in Odessa speaking English and Russian. They were a part of the Ukrainian church, school system, and cultural life. Rena returned to Mississippi to complete two degrees in church music and education. She is now married and continues to live in south Mississippi. Regina received her medical education and married in Ukraine. Both of our daughters grew up in Ukraine, and were an active part of our ministry, and now they both have paid Christian service positions and active families in the local church. They also continue to play an active role in the work in Ukraine. Over the past 30 years we have left behind two houses, each of which can accommodate a large number of guests inside, and 50-70 outside, ... both continue to be used for ministry events. The activities that have been a part of our ministry for the past 30 years, continue. The Apostle Paul told Timothy that the things that he had been taught, he should, *"entrust to reliable people, who will also be qualified to teach others."* (2 Timothy 2:2) We feel that is also our obligation, ... so we are working to transfer ministry to the next generation. Regina and her family continue to live and minister in Ukraine.

Our vision for the future: I wish I knew the future. Our best estimate is that Ukraine will change significantly in the next 2-4 years as the war ends. Some part of Ukraine will become an integrated part of Europe over the next 5-10 years. These changes will result in the emergence of new ministry opportunities, but we will not be the ones who are best suited to undertake these opportunities. Our role will be to support and help develop those who are prepared for these ministry opportunities. Our plan is to *"Support and develop national leaders in ministry."* This is our goal in the next few years. We know that our task is always training and developing the next generation of leaders.

The need for mission work continues in Ukraine. Ukraine continues to represent one of the greatest opportunities for mission work in the foreseeable future. We are committed to continuing in this work, and we urge you to continue with us through your prayers and financial support. God has been active and blessed this work over the past 30 years, and we feel his hand continuing to guide as we plan for the future. We see this plan for the next several years as "reasonable", but God warns us that we do not control the future, and that we should always say, ...

"If it is the Lord's will, ... this is what we plan to do."

The direction we see God leading: We will continue to serve, and our focus will be on *"Supporting and Developing National Leaders in Ukraine."* We will do this through the following activities:

- Ray will continue to travel to Ukraine to teach in-person classes. This also includes on-line classes, because many students are not able to attend in person. Reading materials and assignments are delivered on-line.
- We will continue to publish regular newsletters and updates about the ministry in Ukraine. In 2024 we felt it was more productive to switch to publishing a quarterly newsletter. We continue to give presentations in churches, which allows for questions and addressing specific issues.
- Many needs exist in Ukraine. Many people have been displaced by the war, both internally and outside of Ukraine. The churches in Ukraine find many opportunities to minister to refugees. We will continue to work with local churches to enable them to better minister in these difficulties.
- We feel it is important to build bonds between people, and it has long been our practice to provide snacks, cookouts, and holiday meals for students. These "community building" activities continue. Sometimes we can do these activities ourselves, and other times we provide funding.
- We will continue to be involved with, and to financially support, several of our Ukrainian missionaries who are serving cross-culturally. This includes Ukrainians working in Africa, central Asia, and even Russia.
- We will be involved with new local ministry initiatives including support for youth outreach activities. This involves an age group that is not yet eligible for the draft, and therefore willing to take a more visible role in the community.
- There are always humanitarian projects brought on by the war. This has included evacuation, humanitarian needs, heating needs, and electrical needs. We will continue to work closely with local churches to help meet many of these needs.
- Our house is right across the road from the college and church. This makes it an easy place for youth and church members to gather. It is off the main road and surrounded by a high privacy fence. This gives people a feeling of security and isolation from the difficulties around them. We can easily accommodate 50-70 people under a covered area outside, with cooking and bathroom facilities. The church and Bible college continue to schedule activities at our house, while a teacher from the college lives in our house.
- Personal note: Pam and I have made the choice, that our mission salary, will end in December 2024. This means that we will switch from being "paid" missionaries, to doing much of the same work, but doing it as volunteers. We have always enjoyed our work as missionaries and want to continue doing that same activity. We do not view this as retirement, but instead we feel this is "our most productive service," and that we have new things to offer today, that we did not have 30 years ago. We continue to live in Corinth, Mississippi when not traveling to Ukraine.
- Partners In Missions will continue to receive tax-deductible contributions for the work in Ukraine. Ray and Pam are not retiring, ... just switching to volunteering, which will allow all funds to go towards ministry projects. I am scheduled to return for in-person classes and continue to have an office in Ukraine, as well as in Mississippi, where I have regular office hours and can carry out many of my duties as if I were in Ukraine. We certainly, continue to need your prayers and financial support for the work in Ukraine.
- So, we ask you, ... **Will you continue to be "Partners" with us in this ministry in Ukraine.**