

PARTNERS IN MISSIONS

Training National Leaders for "Ministry"

Supporting and Developing National Leaders in "Ministry"

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

As we celebrate this Easter season, we are reminded that the One who created our world, loves us and died for our sins. **He is risen from the grave and sits on his throne as ruler over his creation.** We are constantly aware that God is good and provides for our needs. This is true, despite the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Even with many calling for "peace" over the recent weeks, the day-to-day suffering in Ukraine has intensified. As the preacher delivered his sermon on Palm Sunday, in the northern Ukrainian town of Sumy, two Russian cruise missiles exploded near the church, killing 34 civilians and injuring many others. A week later, on Easter, the apartment of one of my students was hit in Odessa. (pictured right) He and his family survived, but people's lives are continually being upended. Last month our Bible college president was served his draft notice, while working in his office. He has not been called to service, but is mindful that call can come at any moment. This month another one of our teachers and program directors, was stopped, taken from his car, and sent directly to training. A "Bible" college does not qualify as an essential service, and although they have often been granted exemptions, the situation is becoming more urgent. Sasha does have "official" exemption, because he has been teaching public school for the past year. This exemption also allows him to travel on the weekend and holidays and do church ministry.

The need for ministry continues: The situation in Ukraine is "far" from over, and there is not a simple solution to the conflict. The role of the church continues to be that of bringing God's hope and mercy. New ministry opportunities are emerging amidst the suffering. The conflict brings numerous new opportunities for ministry and proclamation of the gospel.

Support and develop national leaders in ministry: In our newsletter at the beginning of the year, we explained that we saw an increasing opportunity for us to support and help develop those who will carry out these new ministry opportunities. 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.

One way we are "**Supporting and developing national leaders in ministry**" is through a closer working relationship with **Hearts 4 Ukraine.** (the work of Regina and Sasha) Because of the overwhelming number of humanitarian needs and support needs for our students and church workers, we have found it more efficient to join many projects with Regina and Sasha and rely on Regina to administrate those projects when we are absent. The following page is Regina's most recent assessment of needs.



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Update from Regina in the southern city of Odessa:

Ukraine continues to endure daily air raids, as well as missile and drone attacks. This results in a continual uncertainty and fear. There is so much destruction. In Odesa, where Sasha and I, along with our daughters live, the situation is relatively stable, but not without danger. There are times when Odesa comes under massive attacks and we must take shelter in our basement. God continues to provide for our needs.

I travel with a Ukrainian medical team to serve villages in southeast Ukraine. These are areas which were once under enemy occupation, as well as under water, after the Kakhovka Dam was destroyed. At certain time some of those areas are too dangerous to visit, so we can only pray. People remain in these areas, even though their homes continue to come under attack. Some people have evacuated to safer areas and the church continues to function and serve the community. It is often not safe to gather in large groups, so often the church meets in homes. One problem is that many homes have been damaged by Russian kamikaze drones. People doing repair and rebuilding in this area often come under attack from roaming Russian drones. People are trying to rebuild, even as attacks continue, but We trust God, that there will come a day when repairs and rebuilding can take place in peace.

I continue serving at the pregnancy care center where we are seeing an increase in internal refugees seeking help and shelter in Odesa. Odesa is considered a "safer" area for 120,000 registered refugees, ... even though we get our fair share of drone strikes. We provide food packages monthly to clients as well as diapers and humanitarian aid. (Yes, we need financial support with this ministry that also connects refugees to local churches.)

Sasha continues to travel to many areas of Ukraine, working with churches doing ministry training, retreats, and camps. Because of the war, many middle-aged church workers have left the country. Those who have stayed, have often been mobilized, or they try to keep a lower profile to avoid being drafted. This all results in a huge decrease in church workers and volunteers. This has resulted in increased ministry opportunities for training "younger," next generation Kingdom workers. A year ago, Sasha began teaching science, algebra, and geometry at the local public school. He originally took this position, (paying \$160/month) in place of serving in the army. This allowed him to travel on the weekends and continue doing church ministry. Over time, the teaching in the public school has become a new "ministry" opportunity.

While we continue to do the work that we have been called to do, the war has opened new and different ways to serve and be a Christian witness. We have several projects that we are buying supplies for or helping provide for those in need. The southern region of the Odesa region is greatly cut off from the rest of the country because of logistics. This is the area of Sasha's home village and where his parents continue to live and serve in a rural village church. In this area many people have a need for coal or wood for heat and cooking. We have several projects to help purchase heating elements and propane tanks. We are currently helping to refill propane tanks and buy diesel and gasoline for generators. The summer, when prices are lower, is also the time to buy winter supplies.

Other projects include food packages for families in need, which contain basic items that are in short supply in rural areas. This is always done with the local church. In a rural village, everyone knows everyone else, ... so the local church knows who is really in need. In a rural village, everyone knows what the church is doing and how it ministers to those in need. Yes, we need your financial support with these projects. This project has opened the door for the church to the public schools in rural areas. We have been able to provide small gifts and assistance to children in schools.

Russia currently controls about 20% of Ukrainian land, and this results in many people being internally displaced as refugees. This is a ministry opportunity and people are open to the love of Christ being shown through the local church. A lot of men have been drafted into the army, and this also provides a ministry opportunity. We recently worked with a young mom who lost her husband on the battle field and now has to support her family. There is another family where the husband was recently drafted, and now the family is in financial need. And again "yes," your financial support helps to meet some of these needs in the name of Christ.

God is our provider, and we invite you to participate with us in this ministry in Ukraine.

Regina