



The Update

Zaporizhia in more peaceful times

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Serving in a War Zone

You may recall Maxym and Anya who are part of our MCNet Coaching team in eastern Ukraine. Over the years it has been a privilege to work with and coach Maxym and Anya's team. Phil had planned to be in Ukraine in April, which of course has been postponed for now. With the start of the war (or more accurately, the continuation from 2014), Maxym and Anya have remained in eastern Ukraine (Zaporizhia, a city of 1 million) to serve those fleeing from the warzone which is about 25 km further east at this point.

In previous newsletters we have shared the work they have been doing through their ministry, New Hope Centre. Their team has currently seen about 150 people hosted and served through their facility in the last month. They ask for

prayer for: 1) the war to end, 2) strength

started in 2014. As we mentioned in the last newsletters (before the last military escalation), we had planned on meeting in June with our Ukraine and Russian team members in a country they each could easily travel to (Turkey). Due to the recent escalation our plans have now been postponed.

Our friends in Russia,



The New Hope Ctr Team, Zap., Ukr (2017)



Transit Ctr for Refugees

for their team and for refugees to find good homes, 3) that they will be able to help restore not only the destroyed infrastructure, but also the shattered lives of so many.

It seems the events of the last few years continue to remind us that while we may make our plans....it is God who orders our steps. As many, over the last years we have had to adapt to the realities of shutdowns and how we can continue to fulfil our ministry. How and where we were able to work in both Ukraine and Russia changed when the war first



due to the current high cost and other logistics, could also not travel at this time. One of the key purposes was to meet in person with these team members since we could not secure a visa for Russia. We continue to pray for the whole situation and look forward to a day when we can meet together again. Until then, each of the MCNet team members continue to serve the Lord in the face of challenging new realities and we are in regular contact however we can.



Maxym & Anya in Zap with Phil & Nancy and Karl during better days



Latin America Expansion

Carlos, our MCNet* regional coordinator for Latin America, recently taught a leadership workshop for young leaders in the Dominican Rep (DR). Together with Raydel and his team they are preparing to expand the leadership training into Guatemala and other countries in Latin America. Phil will be with their team in DR in late May to facilitate a spiritual retreat using the new material Phil has developed, *Finishing the Race*. As we all know, starting anything is relatively easy....it is the finishing that is a challenge. The Apostle Paul wrote, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith," (2 Tim 4:7) Our



Carlos with young leaders in DR

goal as a ministry is to assist and equip all of our team members, like Paul, to finish the race that God has laid out for them; in their personal lives as well as in their ministries. Finishing the race means passing on the baton of leadership to the next generation. Just as Paul was writing to his younger protégé, Timothy, so these pictures depict Carlos investing in the next generation in DR. Together with their team, our goal as a ministry is to see this replicated throughout Latin America.

*MCNet (Ministry Coaching Network) is a ministry initiative of ICM. It is a network of like-minded leaders committed to mentoring the next generation of leaders within their region/country.

Training Leaders in Germany



Recently, Karl (who pastors in Magdeburg, Germany and teaches on mentoring and leadership within the Intl MCNet family) co-taught a course at a German seminary with Alexey. Alexey was to join him in person, but due to the war was not able to secure a visa for Europe. For the first week they did a hybrid approach teaching the course via video link with Karl in Germany and Alexey from Moscow and then the second week Karl was able to be in person with the class.

As an international team we have learned over the years to not attribute the actions of a leader(s) to those from that nation with whom we work. Having a Kingdom perspective means that we as the body of Christ stay unified regardless of our nationalities and in the face of the decisions leaders of those earthly nations may make. Ultimately, we are citizens of heaven. So please remember to pray for our Russian team members who

are also now facing their own challenges as officials seek to constrict the freedoms on the Church and their ability to serve in their community as believers.



Ministry in Tanzania



Due to the pandemic it has been two years since Phil and Rafik have been able to encourage and train leaders in Tanzania in person. In September of this year they have been invited to return and continue the training and encourage those who have been using the MCNet materials to mentor young leaders during the last couple years. Phil will also be introducing the new Competency Based Mentorship program (MCNet Christian Leadership Institute) with various leadership groups.

They will also spend some time with the Kamau's, who Phil first served with in Kenya in 1990 when the Jeskes lived in Africa. James and Mary have spent the last twenty years as Kenyan missionaries to Tanzania and have established a training seminary as well as various other ministries. Recently, James has had opportunity to spend time with the Maasi people and several communities of faith have been established. He writes, "We have planted three faith communities in three different villages. Pray with us as we seek to plant more such communities of faith in different Maasi villages in the coastal region of Tanzania."

There are very few Maasi men in the churches and so they are specifically focussing on the men, for when a Maasi man comes to faith, his whole household usually joins him.



James (far left) with the Maasi in Tanzania

The Church Serving under Fire

by Dr. Phil

I am sure over the last months you have heard more news about Ukraine than perhaps at any other time in your lifetime. Having worked in this region of the world for many years, through many highs and lows, I hope to offer a perspective that you may not have heard on the regular twenty four hour news cycle. As our focus is on the church and God's kingdom rather than the political situation I will focus my few comments on how our brothers and sisters are being affected.

Since the fall of the Iron Curtain in the early 1990s, evangelical Christianity in Ukraine has been growing exponentially. The laws and political structures have been far more conducive to such growth than most of the other post-Soviet states, including Russia. Political leaders have even been openly practising Baptists and Pentecostals, something unheard of in the past. Of all evangelicals, the Baptists are the largest group, only second in number in all of Europe to the Baptists in UK.

Ukraine has not only become a center of



Typical rented facility of Evangelical Church in Ukr

evangelical training, again due to fewer government restrictions, but also a key mobilizer of missionaries to countries of the former Soviet Union. This is due to a similar culture and language. For example, of the evangelical churches in Russia, 50% are said to be pastored by those of Ukrainian heritage.

Over the last decade, Ukraine has become the hub of Evangelical Christianity in Eastern Europe. While the nineties saw great religious freedom throughout the countries of the previous Soviet Union, from about the year 2000 onward, the various countries of the once Soviet Union took different paths. While Ukraine remained more open to religious groups other than Orthodox, countries such as Russia and Belarus began tightening up religious freedoms for evangelicals. These restrictions were often motivated and carried out by the Russian Orthodox Church.

While perhaps not the main reason, this desire to return once Soviet countries to the pure Orthodox fold is believed by some to be the motivation to reign in Ukraine's aspirations. Of course with dire consequences for the population as well as the Church in the country. This may serve to explain Putin's own speech in which he said about Ukraine that it was an "inherent part of our own history, cultural, and spiritual space."

Since 2014, in the separatist controlled Luhansk area of eastern Ukraine, the Ukrainian Baptist Union has been designated as a terrorist group, their hymnal banned, and all 44 Baptist churches in the region have been closed. Pastors have been beaten and one of the older pastors from the region said that the persecution he was facing "was worse than anything he had lived through during the



Praying on Streets in Donetsk/Donbas, Ukr., 2014

times of the USSR." In other regions like Donetsk, the restrictions have been more like what is typical in Russia today.

In Russia today, at best, there is conditional toleration for evangelical believers and churches/organizations. As long as they stay in their building, in their own lane and keep quiet they are tolerated. The anti-evangelism law, passed in 2016 under the guise of "anti-terrorism," prevents believers from sharing their faith outside of the church. Though initially directed towards Muslims and fringe groups, the law has actually been used most often against Russian evangelicals. Today, passing out New Testaments or meeting in small groups in a home to talk about the Bible is punishable with fines in Russia today, depending upon how aggressive local officials happen to be.

If what has occurred in Crimea and the Donbas is any indication, there is no reason to think that things would be any different in other parts of Ukraine if they were to eventually be under the control of the Kremlin. This does not mean that God's ultimate plan for his Church can be thwarted by one man or even a country. However, there will likely be consequences as to the degree the Ukrainian evangelical Church will be able to influence its neighbour countries. Yet even in spite of the war we have seen how church leaders have continued to shepherd their flock, even though many of the men have had to take up arms. They continue to care for their people and this war has revealed the true strength of the Ukrainian Church.

So while we identify and pray with our Ukrainian brothers and sisters as we watch the news, let us also remember to pray for our Russian brothers and sisters as they also face restrictions. It is so important to maintain a heavenly kingdom perspective, rather than an earthly, nationalistic one. Only then will we be available to be used by God to see his "kingdom come and his will be done on earth even as it is being done in heaven."



Orthodox Church, Zap. Ukr

From My Desk



Phil Jeske, PhD
President



Our Mission

Serving the church by mentoring and coaching ministry teams.

Our Purpose

Our goal is to see another generation equipped so that they may be relevant witnesses in their culture. We accomplish this through mentoring leaders, coaching and consulting with ministry teams, and providing culturally relevant materials that facilitate this process.

Accountability

ICM is an interdenominational non-profit charity registered in both Canada and the USA. It is a faith mission and supported by free-will donations of those of like vision.

ICM adheres to the WEF & Lausanne Covenants statements of faith and takes an evangelical approach to Scripture.

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Over the last few years have you been wondering how world events fit into the narrative of our own life as well as the bigger narrative of God's plan? The effects of the pandemic, and now the war in Ukraine with the potential for expanded global conflict, impact us all in some way. From the larger view we have of our own society to the more personal issue of our financial security not to mention the impact on the mental and physical health of many around us.

Perhaps at times you have even wondered if God was really still in control!? Though we as Christians are not supposed to admit to that out loud, if we are to be completely honest, there are times we wonder what is going on and what is God's plan in all this.

I was revisiting the story of Ruth the other day. As you recall, she goes back to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law, Naomi. Tough times, starvation, on top of being an outsider – she was really at the bottom of the societies' pecking order. You know the story, she is anonymous and just faithfully picking up leftover grain in the field. I am sure it would have been easy for her to question, "Where is this God of Israel that my mother-in-law talked about?" Likely not much help from her as Naomi was depressed and going by the name 'Mara' or bitter. From her perspective God had afflicted her and brought misfortune on her. Sound like at any time during your life (if you are brutally honest, I mean)?

Yet, unlike our lives, we know the end of Ruth's story. From her perspective she was just gleaning in the field, little knowing that in His plans she would become the great grandmother of King David. The fact is that we usually just don't fully comprehend what God is up to in our lives, let alone in the bigger global context and history what he is doing. Guess that's what makes him God. He is always playing the long game, never in a rush, never short sighted, so unlike most of us.

Events such as Ukraine and a pandemic, and all the ramifications, can make us feel that we are not in control (which we aren't!). However those of us from a western worldview really don't like that. Yet, as we see from Ruth, we can have confidence in the fact that God is ultimately in control, based upon the goodness and faithfulness of his character that never changes. The struggles in life, and events we don't understand, are not in contradiction with who God is. The story of Ruth teaches us that our response can have a huge impact on future generations.

So even when we don't understand what God is doing we can gain confidence and peace from the fact that he is not only in control, but we can rely on his love and best interests for us. You may feel like you are just "gleaning" in the field, yet from God's perspective he has a much bigger plan. One day that will all be clear and will be so complete and above anything we can imagine with our current, finite perspective. So let's remember to trust him and rely on him regardless of the challenges we face.

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