

*In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your **partnership in the gospel** from the first day until now....*

Phil. 1:4-5

Why are we Here?



Our host family in Sumy. Sasha, Ira and their two sons, Maxim and Daniel.

November 21 will mark the end of our first ninety days in Ukraine. The reality that we are *here* and not back in Michigan has begun to hit home. So do we miss those annual trips to one of the nearby Michigan apple orchards? Sure. Do we ever have times where a sensory

experience triggers a memory from back home that catches our emotions by surprise? Of course. Do we ever grow weary of feeling like “*inostratzhi*” (foreigners) living in a culture where things look, sound, and often taste so differently? At times. (By the way, we recently celebrated Ukrainian Thanksgiving or Zhatva at our church—and there wasn’t even a turkey!) But it is these very experiences that drive us back to the reality of *why* we are *here*.

The foundation of our mission is the reality that God has placed *all of us* on earth to reflect His image. Early on that image was marred by sin. That is why God made a promise to send His Son into the world. From Bethlehem to Golgotha, God’s Son lived for 33 years on earth— then died and rose

again so that His perfect image could be restored in those who believe on Him. Just as Jesus left heaven and took on human flesh in order to dwell among sinners (John 1:14), He has called you and me to incarnate His truth and love wherever He places us. For Kellie and me, that place is among the people of the Russian-speaking world.

So when we face those occasional moments of nostalgia, we not only consider how much more Jesus has done for us, but also we are learning to enjoy the opportunity to experience new foods, make new friends, learn a new language and traditions and form new memories. The rest of this newsletter (and even more on our website at www.sendbenge.com) will provide

you with a glimpse of what we are experiencing, learning, and doing here in Ukraine.

Russian Language Report Card

We are just past the halfway point of our first semester of Russian. While we still struggle to comprehend Russian sermons and often have to ask people to repeat themselves, we see significant progress in our language acquisition. We have advanced from words and phrases (and occasional dependence on sign language and charades) to full sentences using the past, present, and future tenses. We use Russian when we shop, eat out or when we attend church or our (Russian-speaking) small group.

Our Ukrainian brothers and sisters in Christ have been a real encouragement to us in this.

Kellie’s report on our recent ministry trip to Sumy

Recently we took a 5-hour trip to Sumy which is about 200 miles northeast of Kiev near the Russian border. When we arrived on Friday evening, we were taken to our host’s home, a wonderful young Ukrainian family. Sasha and Ira and their two boys opened their hearts and homes to us for the weekend. It was encouraging to see how our Russian

speaking has improved since we first arrived here as we were able to converse and fellowship with them. On Saturday, we visited several ministries including a Christian camp and an ESL club for children. On Sunday, we attended AM worship at one of the main Baptist churches and then visited two village churches where Jerry preached. In a village of 6,000, one of the churches had only 8 people attending. The region is one of the poorest in Ukraine, and life is very hard for the people. But what broke our hearts was seeing the spiritual poverty and apathy. In nearly every village, there is a huge, beautiful orthodox church—even though the



Jerry (with an interpreter) preaching at a village church outside of Sumy.

villagers live in relative poverty. And often villagers are discouraged from attending evangelical churches by local religious leaders. We were especially bur-

dened when we observed people worshipping, kissing and praying to religious icons that cannot save them. There is much work to be done here. Barely 2% of the population in Ukraine is evangelical—yet it is considered the Bible Belt of the former Soviet Union. As we met with the team of five missionaries in Sumy, we were impressed by their perseverance and faith in God’s plan for them. We rode home on the train on Monday morning, and thanked the Lord for the opportunity to see more of the world through His eyes.

Praise Reports:

- Progress made in acquiring the Russian language.
- We are starting to assimilate into our Ukrainian church.
- Our daughter Karissa will be with us for Christmas

Prayer Requests:

- Mental strength and patience in our language studies.
- Wisdom in building relationships with Ukrainian friends and neighbors.
- Safety for Karissa as she travels here on Dec. 14.

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