

*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*

## Breaking News . . . From Ukraine!

*It has been three months since we sent out our last newsletter, so we want to use this edition to update you on: 1) recent events in Ukraine, 2) what we are learning about life in Ukraine, and 3) our ongoing ministry and language preparation (and challenges). Our prayer requests for this edition are indicated in bold text throughout.*

### The Revolution That Wasn't

The so-called Orange Revolution (which was a movement away from Russian domination toward closer relations with Western Europe and the US) is over. The newly elected president (Victor Yanukovich) is moving Ukraine back to closer ties with Russia. While Ukraine (like Russia) will never return to the days of communism, they are moving toward an increasingly centralized government which could possibly restrict freedoms and which may prove to be increasingly hostile to evangelical churches here. Time will tell. Overall in the former USSR, there is growing opposition to the Gospel. Already, some former Soviet countries (such as Belarus and Tajikistan ) no longer allow western missionaries to enter their countries. Russia is restricting visas for missionaries to 6 months per year and Kazakhstan recently enacted a similar restriction. It seems that for now, the door to the former USSR is beginning to close. This makes ministry in Ukraine all the more crucial for the Gospel to the Russian speaking world. **Please pray for the leaders of Ukraine--specifically that God will work through them in such a way that the Gospel is advanced in Ukraine and the Russian-speaking world (I Timothy 2:1-6).**



*Kellie and I spent an afternoon at Living Hope, an after-school care center in Odessa*

### “It’s a (Not So) Wonderful (Ukrainian) Life.”

The average person in Ukraine struggles to maintain their quality of life due to Ukraine’s fragile economy. Government attempts to improve the situation by printing money only add to the problem via rapidly increasing inflation. Many Ukrainian families (especially in relatively expensive Kiev) have to live in small apartments (400-500 square foot “flats”) where up to 3 generations dwell in very tight living conditions. Many feel hopeless and are resigned to enduring life in a dismal situation that seems unlikely to improve. The good news in all this is that difficulty and a loss of hope in circumstances are often the very things that God uses to bring people to see their need of the Gospel. **Pray that God will work in the hearts of believers to prepare them for ministry opportunities during these challenging times.**



*Jerry teaching biblical counseling at the “Ark Church” in Sumy*

### The Challenge facing the Evangelical Churches in Ukraine.

The challenge not many years ago was persecution—which actually served God’s purposes in keeping His church pure. While the freedom that came with the breakup of the Soviet Union initially resulted in a great harvest of conversions in the 90’s, a lot of “baggage” from the West came with it: materialism, media influences that portray and condone sexual immorality, and doctrinal confusion coming from various expressions of false teaching (such as cults, prosperity gospel, etc). Many of the evangelical churches have reacted with a “circle the wagons” mentality that emphasizes isolation from society and a “holiness” that comes through maintaining a

check list of traditions. Consequently few churches are growing, either numerically or spiritually. What is seriously needed is an ever-deepening understanding of the Gospel that enables believers to deal with the real enemy—their own indwelling sin. This in turn produces humility, hope, and joy in a Savior who is *bigger* than our sin! When the Gospel is paramount in the lives of believers—it cannot help but overflow to those outside the faith who need it most. As a side note to this, Jerry recently had the opportunity of team teaching with another American pastor in a one week biblical counseling module for believers in Sumy (5 hours east of Kiev). What a blessing to see church leaders with an incredible passion for the Gospel and who are winning and discipling drug addicts to become joyful, fruitful followers of Jesus Christ. **Pray that God will be pleased to multiply such passion for Jesus Christ in Ukraine!**



*Jerry preaching in chapel at Odessa Theological Seminary*



*Kellie giving her testimony at the Komentorovo church near Odessa*

### **Our Current Ministry Preparation and Challenges**

Kellie and I are making good progress in reading, writing, and speaking Russian. We had a chance to use our Russian in a recent ministry trip to Odessa where we gave our testimonies (in Russian) and stayed with Russian speaking hosts. But our biggest challenge is in *hearing* Russian. We hear “slowly” and often we have to ask people to repeat a question or statement. While we have been told that this is normal, we desire to see significant improvement in this area over the next few months. **Please continue to pray for our progress in this area.**

### **The Goal of our Ministry**

**Our goal is to train pastors (present and future) how to lead and shepherd their congregations in the Russian-speaking world.** Opportunities that are taking shape include teaching in the newly formed Master of Arts in Biblical Counseling degree program at Kiev Theological Seminary, other classes related to pastoral ministry at KTS, potential relationships with other schools in Ukraine, and building mentoring relationships with current pastors who want to move toward a biblical model of shepherding in their churches.



*We traveled by overnight train to Odessa with fellow SEND missionary, Wendy Bresnahan*

### **Update on our Family**

After 8 months away, we have seen and experienced firsthand not only the faithfulness of the Lord, but also His mysterious ways of working, especially in our family. As one friend told me before leaving, “You will probably see more of God’s working in all of your lives from afar than you would have seen if you had stayed here.” I think she was right! We see closer relationships between our children than they have had before. Karissa has been called to short-term ministry at a camp in Sumy, Ukraine for the summer. Please pray as she prays and trusts the Lord for the funds to do that. We are ecstatic that all of our children and our grandson will get to come over here, Lord willing, June 16 - June 28. Joel is working diligently at Wayne State University in Detroit on an English Major that he hopes to finish this coming December. Jeremy and Michelle are faithfully serving in their local church in Louisville and encouraging Karissa at Boyce College. **There have been more prayers than ever before in behalf of our family, and we know God has honored them and blessed us abundantly.**

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