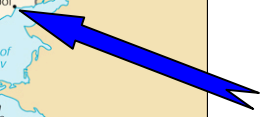


Russia Ukraine 2002



A report of the trip from August 20 to September 16, 2002
made by Carl McMurray (Nashville, TN),
Shannon Shaffer (Greenwood, IN),
and Joshua Creel (Pinson, AL)

2002 TRIP – RUSSIA/UKRAINE

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Introduction

As I review my notes and prepare my thought for this report, it is certainly done with mixed feelings. This ninth trip to Russia has by far been one with more of an emotional mix than any previous trip. Warmth, thankfulness, and frustration are not unusual emotions of these journeys. Thrills and excitement to see God’s power and providence working also are not completely foreign. During this trip, however, we also had a fair dose of shock, revulsion, and disappointment. Others have tasted these things, I know, but for me it was a first time.

Part I, Tula, Russia

Eighteen to twenty hours after leaving Nashville, I arrived with Shannon Shaffer and Joshua Creel in Tula, Russia. It felt good to be back. On this trip of about a month, almost the first two weeks will be spent in Tula. Our purpose was twofold. First, to visit and study with the church here that we helped to plant several years ago, like Paul and Barnabas. They have been inviting us for four years to return. And second, to ask questions and gather personal information on a division in the church here so serious that the churches in Tula, Kaluga, Orel, and Moscow are all affected.

While meeting with the church on the Lord’s day we were also able to have a special requested study on “women of the Bible” during the midweek study. We had almost nightly studies in Luke with Sasha, an English speaker who later did some translating for us. We also had studies with Andrew, another friend of Misha’s who has expressed interest in spiritual things, Dima and Max (more friends and prospects).

At the same time, the above work was always overshadowed by our secondary purpose, that of attempting to unravel the truth about certain accusations, charges, and reports that have gone out concerning Michael Lapyonko and Alex Seryogin.

These two men have been mainstays in the work in Russia for 5 or 6 years. They have been a great team, maturing and effective in the work. Alex is an educated small college English teacher with a calm, thoughtful manner while Misha (Michael) is a laughing, ex-body builder who started learning English by listening to MTV. Both men gave up lucrative personal businesses to begin preaching. Both men are now effective translators, seem loved, respected, and well spoken

of by brethren there, and together, they have been effective in saving souls and building up the church in Tula, Orel, Kaluga, and Moscow. Just two years ago this team met and baptized ten men in one year. There are many churches in the United States who cannot boast such, and that is without mentioning the difficulty of this field. They have certainly been a strong force for truth in the Russian church and have sacrificed time, effort, pride, and money to build the kingdom. They are proven workers. You can imagine my shock a few months ago at hearing that both these men had been marked. Both were accused of extorting and stealing money from other preachers. All three of us on this trip had worked closely with these fellows. We all trusted in their faithfulness, having seen demonstrations of it repeatedly over the years and spending time in their homes. We each wanted to learn more before turning from our brothers on the word of another. I have not seen, I know, all reports on this issue, but one report, most clear and disturbing, was a report by brother Jim Thayer. Several plain and damaging statements were made that we simply had to verify.

Those statements identified:

- 1) Misha and Alex as “wicked” and “evil” men,
- 2) Whom the church had withdrawn from.
- 3) That three American brethren investigated and came back with “convincing proof that the charges were accurate.”
- 4) That the church in Tula had been declining and hurting because of the hypocrisy and evil of these men; i.e. “many Christians and potential Christians quit coming to worship”...and “could plainly see hypocrisy in the lives of the these men and were turned off by it.”
- 5) That since the above mentioned marking, the church in Tula, Kaluga, and Orel had rebounded in strength and numbers and was better off than before, ie. “have grown well beyond what they were before.”
- 6) That the accusers of these men were godly, capable workers for the Lord..

To my knowledge brother Thayer did not go to Tula, nor did he speak with anyone besides some of the accusers. Let it be said here that I am not questioning Jim Thayer’s integrity at all. Also, the investigating brethren, to my knowledge spoke with no one except some of the accusers. However, the reports about the matter we received from speaking to five other brethren that were part of this situation gave us a far different picture and caused us to question, not these two Russian brothers, but the activities of an American in those churches and his “accusing” co-workers. All the interviews we were able to make are noted at the end of this report. All interviews were independent of each other, using different translators, one of which is not even a member of the church. We compared notes and impressions nightly on what we were hearing. Frankly, we were a little surprised at the way everyone’s story seemed to agree and verify what others told us, even though we were shocked at the account of events and broken hearted over what has been done to the Lord’s cause. Based upon what we were told, and verified by other Christians, I will share with you the impressions, related to us, by the Russian brethren. The following is a compilation of accounts.

In March of 2002, Ron Roark, presently of Fultondale, Alabama, appeared in Tula. Ron usually e-mailed his plans to Misha before coming. So, Misha said that his appearance was a surprise, but not a problem. Brother Roark preached one Sunday in Tula and then he and two other preachers, Igor and Ramon came to dinner at Misha’s that week. There was no mention of any

apparent problem. On Sunday Ron asked to speak again and changed the order of the service to having the Lord's Supper first and the preaching last. Near the end of his lesson, we were told, brother Roark launched into a number of accusations against Misha and Alex. These consisted of:

- 1) Misha's divorce, about two years earlier, not being for fornication.
- 2) They, Misha and Alex, were extorting money (forcing and stealing) from other preachers.
- 3) Misha was always complaining about having to take the bus to Kaluga even though he had a car.
- 4) Misha was not taking care of the brethren.*

**This last one seems to have been made by one who the other members simply referred to as a "disgruntled member who always complains." We never got a name, they would always just dismiss this one as "the disgruntled member."*

The floor seems to have been given to Misha here for a while. During his response, he asked one preacher, Igor, publicly, if the accusations were true. Igor replied "no", even though he had signed a statement for Ron saying "yes." He told Misha, publicly there in the meeting, that he wished he could support him, but that he would lose his "money, job, and everything." A nine year old girl told me that even she had heard this in the meeting. I'm wondering if brother Roark's Russian is so good now that he heard and understood this conversation, or did he miss this surprising revelation? About this time "Ron called for a vote." (This surprising statement was made more than once by more than one person.) They voted, and it appears that most all the church voted for Misha and did not believe the accusations. Only Ramon and his wife (who were not members) and "the disgruntled member" voted against Misha, i.e. for his dismissal.

Ron got up again and repeated the accusations. He said that he had "documents" proving the charges (although it seems no one saw these documents, and it now appears they were just five signed statements from the preachers accusing Misha). Brother Roark told the church they couldn't associate with Misha and that Igor would be preaching. Many members knew Igor and were not happy with this pronouncement. Then brother Roark offered an alternative. Misha could still attend as a member, but he would just be dismissed as a preacher. This also was unsatisfactory. Brother Roark has been in charge of the money being used for renting a meeting place for several years now. The Russian brethren were made to understand that if Misha stayed, Ron would stop the money, and move the meeting place (and he did!) Misha and Emma (Misha's mother) offered the use of their flat for the church to meet in, and when faced with the loss of all materials, Misha demanded the songbooks and Bibles he had bought on his own. People were getting up and walking out of the worship about this time with disgust at these proceedings. My understanding is that some brethren ("the church"?) now meet in a place connected, somehow, with a business of Ron Roark. This is not confirmed, just an opinion the Russians held.

Misha was later invited to meet privately with Ron and the other preachers that were accusing him. He declined meeting with them in private after they had publicly accused him, without warning, in the worship assembly that Sunday morning. He was also approached later by Ron and encouraged to lay all blame on Alex and perhaps things would fare better for him. Misha

declined the offer. Igor came to Misha's home and repeated his lament given in the assembly of wishing he could stand with Misha but being fearful of losing his income.

Misha was told, by Ron Roark, that his support would be stopped, so Misha went back to secular work. Unfortunately, some miscommunication and working two jobs caused him to miss another meeting at a later date to defend himself to American brethren connected with the church that supported him. The irony is that it was an American that made this necessary in the first place. While the very church he worked with in Tula, had no complaint against him, and was at peace.

Presently, there are a group of saints meeting regularly at Misha and Emma's flat. Misha still continues to have personal studies with interested prospects. I know this because I studied with these non-Christians also. Some are considering obedience. They are presently in need of some more Bibles, songbooks, chairs, etc., since those things were taken away from them. The size of the two groups seem to be about even on Sunday at about 7-9, but it is hard to tell since I was told that a number that usually meet at Emma's were on vacation or at their dachas. I do know that although we were told that "Ron's church" (as it was called to us) was meeting midweek, no one was there. Accounts, like brother Thayer's report, that the church was suffering before that fatal Sunday were plainly denied by several members and the statement that the church in Tula is better off now is obviously and patently false. Of course, since "Ron's" (NOT the church's) marking of Misha and Alex, and his placing of other men in other congregations in Orel, Moscow, and Kaluga, this harm done is spread to those churches. By the way, again contrary to the report, only one family was taken from the church in Moscow. Alex continues to host the church in his flat (since their meeting place was also taken away) and they continue to have confidence in him in spite of the accusations. These two men, Misha and Alex, have been slandered and ruined among the churches, and the churches where they worked have been decimated emotionally. I suppose that others have experienced such activities since there is nothing new under the sun, but frankly, the more I listened, the more shocked and disheartened I have become at what has been done to the kingdom here.

The following conclusions are mine and mine alone.

I sat and listened to humble Russian Christians pour out their hearts and question what appeared to be unbiblical activities. One was an elderly lady who has known Misha since he was 13 and says anyone who claims he stole money is out of their mind, "crazy". I've watched him (Misha) stop on the street and gently take old women's arms to help them up and down steps. I see him stop and smile and give attention to the old women who sit outside, and I've heard how impressed they all are with this big, kind, handsome Russian. He's taught English to little girls, and late one night I followed him into a conversation of gentle rebuke for 8-10 leather clad youth who were vandalizing the street. The guy is fearless, and faithful, and if I have to choose a companion to be with in holding out the gospel in Russia, it will continue to be this man.

In our investigation I found it fascinating that of the six preachers who are connected with brother Roark and were called upon to bear witness and accuse Misha and Alex of extortion, one has quit preaching because he told me, (referring to Ron and the other five) "I don't want to be associated with such men as that." He continues to fellowship and have confidence in Alex Seryogin in spite of the accusations.

The second preacher had a reputation for drinking and was dismissed from preaching for not working, but is found “on the payroll” when the accusations are made. I also could not discover in any way how Misha supposedly got hands on his support since Misha was never connected in the matter of “giving and receiving” with him. His taped statement that Misha would kill him if he didn’t hand over money is so ludicrous as to be laughable to anyone who knows Misha. (In fact, that’s what I did, i.e. started laughing)

The third preacher is a caught and confirmed liar who has also been dismissed in the past for not doing the work, or even living in the town he was supposed to be in. I spoke to a professional accountant with an international accounting company in Moscow who doesn’t even know the situation. He flatly stated the man was a liar for claiming \$45,000 had been stolen. It just wasn’t possible in Russia. This man complained to us about not getting his \$200 monthly support while bragging that he made between \$1000 and \$2000 per month. My question was why was he being supported at all??

Preacher number four had been caught stealing from his employer and avoided jail time by selling his car. This wife-beating thief was working as a preacher all the time that this was going on with his secular job. Brother Roark is aware of the situation.

Preacher number five has a reputation for drinking and nightclubbing that he has been “hushing up” the members about so Ron and/or Misha wouldn’t find out. His lies have also been confirmed by signing a statement saying one thing and then speaking the opposite.

And preacher number six is a registered mental patient. He has to go for annual checkups because of his depression and suicide attempts. His mother has approached Misha for protection because this man had been beating her.

I understand that we all have things in our past that we want to live down. But, **MANY OF THE ABOVE ACTIVITIES WERE WITHIN THE LAST 12 MONTHS.** Some of the above were “put on the dole” after only being a Christian for a few months. They were untested, unproven, and simply had not had time for godliness to become their manner of life. I also admit, after talking to a number of the saints there, I was beginning to ask two questions repeatedly.

- 1) How could anyone take the accusations of this rogue’s gallery seriously?
- 2) What has been being done to our brethren in Russia?

My personal conclusions are:

- 1) The church here has been decimated spiritually and emotionally.
- 2) Good men have been ruined, not by sinner’s attacks, but by supposed brethren
- 3) Worthless men have been “placed” in their position.
- 4) The autonomy of local churches has been trampled.
- 5) Churches have had no say in who will work with them.
- 6) They have been “assigned” preachers by an outsider.
- 7) The Tula church was told to “vote” on a “dismissal” rather than taught about withdrawal.
- 8) Aside from the scriptures not being followed, there does not even seem to have been any common courtesy extended in bringing an accusation against a brother or even trying to seek his repentance.

- 9) A foreigner has been allowed, by his handling and directing of money in a number of churches and accounts, to determine meeting places and leadership.

I have no problem with the Biblical concept of churches choosing their own messenger, but when the “messenger” is determining who receives support, who will be cut off, and where the church will meet; the messenger begins to look like a personal missionary society of some kind who gives orders and makes decisions. I am amazed at brethren sometimes who do things in other countries they would never try/could never get away with here in the United States.

As has happened before in places like the Philippines, (yes, and even in the States, I believe) it seems that a small number of envious, untested workers with dollar signs in their eyes have seized opportunity to slander and destroy the objects of their jealousy. Some of these men had only been Christians a few months before they received their “appointment” to preach and money from the States. In the words of a young man who used to work with me, I’ve got to ask, “What are brethren thinking?” The only question in my mind now is, was this duplicity only on the part of the Russian accusers, or did they receive direction? I’m not sure I want the answer to that question, and I certainly don’t need it to see that much wrong has been done already

Churches have been given orders rather than teaching, and their leaders have been appointed rather than choosing their own. Which U.S. church would put up with this? Would the church in Fultondale, AL where both Roark labors, allow an outsider to tell them where they will meet or who their preacher would be? Good men have been publicly accused and marked without ever being approached for repentance, publicly or privately. Support for proven and tested men has been cut off based upon the word of unproven men, of questionable character. A supposed “messenger” is making decisions and giving orders, and good brethren have been trusting him to do so rather than spending the money and following up on their own. There are a number of practices in overseas work that need to be addressed, such as, sending the men’s wives with them, sending older men with younger men, accountability, and spending the money on building relationships and follow-up. Perhaps this is not the place to address all these issues, but maybe it’s time for a wake up call to do things right. Even if it costs more money, let’s do it right! Souls are at stake.

One more of my personal opinions that I hate to voice, and that is all it is, is that if anyone needs to be dismissed from the work in Russia, it is brother Ron Roark. If he wants to run a business in Russia, that is his business, but he needs to quit mixing up the two, i.e. running his business and running the church. There are questions in the minds of Russian brethren about his business and his business companions that I have no interest in pursuing. Those are his personal affairs and I am only interested in kingdom affairs here. I fully expect him to be angry about these conclusions. Indeed, before we ever left on this trip, brother Roark was voicing suspicions aloud that we were going over to “sandbag” him. I must say that having not even spoken to Ron in years, no such thought was ever entertained by us. Now though, having heard the “rest of the story,” it appears that he had reason to think someone might see some problems with his handling of these affairs. I do.

I also must add that as I’m writing this Ron has not had his say about our findings. Upon returning to the States, we attempted to contact him. My phone attempts failed, but brother Creel

did manage to reach Ron and he was not available until November, after a 14 week trip to Russia and South America. I was financially supported to make this trip so I had a report to send. I chose not to wait 14 weeks before sending out my report. Perhaps there is yet some reasonable and Biblical explanation for what we found

Misha and Alex are doing secular work now so the churches have lost their full commitment to spiritual work. Brethren continue to meet with them in Tula and in Moscow, however. They continue to try to teach others and encourage each other although they have been betrayed and hurt. They are unwelcome in Orel and Kaluga and do not go there now, and the churches in Tula and Moscow are divided (although with Moscow, as stated above, it was only one family). I, and those with me, do not recognize the “marking” of these men by brother Roark, and we will continue to assist the churches meeting in their homes as much as possible.

Misha has been hurt to the extent that he has no wish to return to being supported. He earns his own living, lives with his mother, and preaches and teaches as he is able. I am presently trying to raise support for Alex Seryogin and would be happy to talk further with interested parties. He is a knowledgeable and valuable teacher by profession. He speaks English and presently has a commentary on the life of Christ about half written, in Russian. His wife is a Christian and he hosts the church in Moscow in his home. Both these men were sickened to talk about the whole affair, but if you know of anyone who would be committed to the supporting the kingdom effort in Moscow, again, I’d be glad to talk further with them.

End of part I

Part II

The new church in Mariupoul, Ukraine

This part of our trip was definitely an upswing from the first two weeks.

On May 6th, two days after Shannon Shaffer and I decided firmly on a date to go to Russia in August, I received an email from Gardner Hall who works with Hispanic brethren in New York. He had received an email from some brethren in Argentina. It appears that there was a family in Argentina who had come from the Ukraine. Upon their conversion there in Argentina several years ago, the woman, Sveta, began communicating with her mother. They had been studying and talking long distance for 2 or 3 years when her mother in the Ukraine, Alexandra Sinitcena told her that she was ready to be baptized. Additionally she communicated, if someone would come to teach and baptize, she could offer hospitality and several more souls who would listen to the gospel. We made arrangements for border crossings, visas, and a twenty hour train ride south from Tula to Mariupoul, a seaport in Ukraine on the Azotus Sea.

We arrived on Saturday afternoon and visited the address that we had after settling into the hotel. Alexandra was at her dacha, but her son in law told us that she would be home the following evening, on the Lord's day, at about 5 pm. We returned then.

I'm not sure who was the most excited, her or us. She said that she had been told by her daughter 3 months earlier that someone was coming, "Are you them?" she asked. Confirming we were the expected ones, we began to talk about her Bible studies, her books that she read, and her request to be baptized. We asked if she still desired that, and she replied, "Yes, of course, when can I be baptized?" We said, "how about right now?" and she stated, "That is exactly the right answer!. If we had asked her to wait, she said that she would have known it was the devil." We proceeded to the seashore and the first one of our fellowship in that place was baptized into Christ on that Lord's day evening. We then went to a quiet café where the sea breeze blew in on that August evening and with noone else present in the whole place except for her and the four of us, we studied, prayed, and ate the body and blood of our Lord. She just kept repeating, "Slava Boga, Slava Boga", i.e. praise God!

Alexandra told us about her life as an avowed atheist and about her plans for immediately contacting others and beginning daily studies. She was as good as her word. The next day we met her daughter Marina and then Eugenia, an old friend, and Eugenia's daughter Olga. On Wednesday we baptized Marina and Eugenia. And the next day another family began attending our studies. Sergai, is a retired military man. He has a wife, Vallia, and three children. Vallia was baptized after our first study with this family. She told us that this is what they had been studying and reading about in their home for several years. We later found out that Sergai is the brother of Andrew (who is married to Sveta in Argentina). Although believing at first that he was already a Christian since he already had faith, Sergai was also added to the Lord after a question and answer session with Misha. Two of their children, Olga, (age 20) and Tanya (16) were baptized the next day. They these two young ladies had already been baptized into a Charismatic church, but after a lesson on false teachers, and spiritual gifts, they came to me and wanted immediate baptism. When I asked them about their previous ones, they said "yes" they had been baptized into that church, but the Bible lesson had taught them that this was wrong and they wanted to be

part of the church in the New Testament. Studies like this went on every day we were there from about one or two till about 6 or 7 each evening.

What a week. By the second Lord's day we were there in worship with seven new Christians. The focus of our worship was Acts 2 and comparing the new church in Jerusalem to the new church in Mariupoul. We especially focused on breaking down Acts 2:42 into the four areas that they would need to "continue steadfastly in". We sang, prayed, taught the apostles doctrine, ate the body and blood of Christ, and they even took up their own first collection after a serious discussion of accountability, openness in all things, and encouraging Misha to return and teach by paying for his expenses. It was marvelous.

I might add here that Bruce Hudson (Bangor, Maine) has made a number of trips to Ukraine in past years and worked with the church in Kharkov. Those Christians, although still faithful, have presently re-located to other countries, including the states, so that congregation no longer exists there. Although institutional brethren have made great headway in this country, this new church in Mariupoul is now the only church of our fellowship in that nation.

While there, we explored and tried to discover what aides might be available for teachers coming later. In addition to two excellent and reasonably priced hotels, we found a UPS office that will decipher English addressing, plenty of exchange kiosks for money, some limited use of Visa cards, a central mall (easily accessible with a multitude of goods) cheap taxi's, plenty of food and restaraunts, an airport so one can fly into Mariupoul from Kiev, and a Humanities Institute with a class of 2nd and 3rd year translating students that would love to polish their English speaking skills and make a little money on the side. This is all on top of a town about the size of Nashville, TN that is used to foreigners since it is a seaport, and generally friendly as far as we could tell.

The next day Shannon and I left to return to Russia to work and visit more with the church there. Brother Creel stayed on, with Misha Lapyonko to spend another week with the new saints, studying, practicing singing, and confirming their faith. That Monday we left, Olga asked to be baptized. We had been hoping she would so we were thrilled at the news. 8 new- borns in the church there including an entire family and a male, mature member.

The last few days of our trip were "interesting" as we went in three different directions. Shannon in Tula, visiting with the saints there. Joshua and Misha in Mariupoul, and myself in Moscow. There was a bit of a problem in getting back into Russia because of a visa mistake which my visa company still claims was NOT a mistake. They claim the Russian passport police made the mistake. Whoever made the mistake, I was the one who got deported back to Kiev. I was put back on the plane and sent back to Ukraine, where I was also refused entry because they said my visa there had been used up. They finally let me in and I spent the night in Kiev and got to the Russian embassy the next day. After paying a one day price for a new visa, I was back on a plane to Moscow and in my brother's apartment in Moscow by midnight the next evening. I got to spend some time with Alex Seryogin, there in Moscow and worship in his home where the church meets now, on Sunday. Because of lodging complications, I ended up just staying in Moscow where we three all met up at the airport for our return on Monday.

In conclusion

Although unsure at first, we felt that the three goals of our trip had been abundantly met.

- 1) We met and studied and encouraged the saints in the church at Tula.
- 2) We investigated (and cleared in our minds) the charges against Misha & Alex.
- 3) We were blessed to be able to sow seed in good ground and plant a new congregation in Mariupoul, Ukraine.

We are presently faced with two missions and if you would be interested in helping, please contact me.

- 1) We are trying to raise \$1000 per month for Alex Seryogin to be able to give his full time to preaching the gospel in Moscow. The church has had it's share of problems for the past 9 years and Alex seems to be well suited to be able to help them.
- 2) We are trying to line up teachers to go to Mariopoul. These new Christians need encouragement and had tears in their eyes when we even spoke of leaving. If we could get teams of a couple guys (or even with their wives) to go each month for just a couple weeks throughout the year, it would be greatly secure this harvest. Just two weeks is all that's needed. Just two Lord's days. That would give them two Sundays' a month to study and worship on their own and two Sundays with a teacher there. Would you or your preacher sign up for a month next year? (November 02, and May 03 are presently signed for) Would you go or send a teacher?

My greatest thanks go out to the brethren from Montana to Indiana to Tennessee who made it possible for me to be a part of their fellowship. To think that Christians from the States could go to Ukraine as a part of an outreach for Christians in Argentina, working together in Kingdom business... that's humbling for me and I'm thankful for your fellowship. Lord willing, and my wife, I'd like to return next year. Please keep us in your mind and budget.

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Anyone desiring to receive a CD containing the following, please contact me. There may be a couple bucks charge for postage and envelope.

- Acrobat Reader
- Email Reports (the ones Shannon Shaffer sent during the trip)
- Pictures McMurray
- Pictures Shaffer
- PowerPoint Presentation (the ones Shannon Shaffer showed to the brethren
w/notes w/most of the 300 slides)
- PowerPoint Viewer (in case someone doesn't have PowerPoint)
- Reports
 - Josh
 - Carl
 - Shannon

Likewise, reports and pictures should soon be up and posted on EvangelismUpdate.com for future reference.

III. Joshua Creel's Ukrainian Update

This report is to provide an update on the work that was started in Mariupol, Ukraine by Shannon Shaffer (Indianapolis, IN), Carl McMurray (Nashville, TN), Joshua Creel (Pinson, AL) and Misha Lapenko (Tula, Russia). The four of us arrived in Mariupol on the 31st of August and the Lord blessed our work exceedingly. In the first week of our stay, seven souls were added to the church of our Lord. On the 9th of September our company parted ways in order to accomplish more work for our Lord. Carl McMurray and Shannon Shaffer returned to Russia to work with the saints there, while Misha Lapenko and myself (Joshua Creel) remained in Mariupol to work with the saints there for another week. This report is to describe what transpired in that week. A full account of the first week in Mariupol can be found in the reports provided by Carl McMurray and Shannon Shaffer.

A New Sister in Christ

On Monday, September 9, Misha Lapenko and myself continued to study with those who were willing. There were only two people present for our Monday study: Marina, who had obeyed the gospel the previous week, and Olga. Olga is the daughter of Eugenia, who had also obeyed the gospel the previous week. This was not the first study that we had with Olga. She had been present for many of our earlier studies and she always followed along in her Bible showing great interest and asking many questions. We had talked with her about obeying the gospel on previous occasions, but she had not been ready. During this study we focused on the Judgment Day and how all of us must prepare ourselves for that Day. As our study concluded, Olga made her desire to obey the gospel known. Misha and I were more than happy to assist her in that request.

By this time it was nearing 7:30pm. It was already dark outside, but we decided to head for the spring in the woods anyway. Although we could not see our way most of the time, we finally arrived at the spring. It was a cloudless night and the moon provided all of the light that we needed. By 8:00pm, Olga had washed away her sins and was a new creature in the Lord's church.

More Contacts and Studies

During the week, Misha and I continued to study with whomever wished to study. I was greatly encouraged to see the Christians inviting their friends and family to study and ask questions. Many were unwilling to study, but there were some who were willing to sit down for a study and to ask us questions:

1. Luda: On Tuesday, September 10, Luda, who is one of Alexandra's friends, joined our study. She did not seem very interested in what we were studying, as she did not follow along in the scriptures. After our study was over she did ask some questions regarding the Orthodox church, etc. She said that she might see us again, but she never returned to our studies.
2. Emma: Emma, another of Alexandra's friends, also joined our studies on Tuesday, September 10. Again, she did not follow along in the scriptures as we talked, but she did have several questions. Most of her questions revolved around "End Time" issues such

as Armageddon and the 1000 year reign of Christ. We talked with her about the setting of Revelation and how it was a letter written concerning issues of the 1st and 2nd centuries, *Revelation 1:1*, and tried to stress the symbolic nature of the book. She seemed very interested in what we had to say and also said that she would return for future study. We thought that she would return, but unfortunately we did not see her again during our stay.

3. Anna: Anna was our most encouraging contact during the week. She began to come to our studies beginning on Wednesday, September 11 and returned for each study thereafter. She is friends with both Alexandra and Eugenia and works in a local shop. She was quite shy in that she did not wish to ask us any questions, but she seemed to have the proper attitude in that she “searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so,” *Acts 17:11*. In this she demonstrated the same attitude as the 8 who obeyed the gospel during our 2 week stay. It is my hope and belief that Anna will be added to the Lord’s church in the near future.
4. Sergei: Sergei is Marina’s husband. He attended one of our studies during the first week, but did not attend any future studies. Both Misha and myself had the opportunity to talk with him in other settings, but he did not appear very interested in spiritual matters at the time. His wife Marina is continuing to talk with him about the Bible and even asked Misha for help in determining what to study with Sergei.

Strengthening the Saints

During our final week we were able to meet with the saints of Mariupol on a daily basis to study and enjoy each others’ company. Most days we would arrive at either Alexandra or Eugenia’s flat around 2:00 and would not leave till at least 7:00, often times 8:00. We were able to study various topics such as the Judgment Day, the resurrection, Christian love, and the purpose of the Old Testament. Each study was an enjoyment in that all present would follow along in the Scriptures and ask insightful questions. They never seemed to tire of studying God’s word.

We were also able to make copies of various hymns and practice them with the saints during the week. Misha would lead them in singing the Russian version, and I would chime in with the English version. While it might not have been beautiful to the human ear, I believe that all were making “melody in their heart to the Lord,” *Ephesians 5:19*. By the end of the week we had practiced “How Great Thou Art”, “Blessed Assurance”, “Standing on the Promises”, “What a Friend we have in Jesus”, “Tis So Sweet To Trust In Jesus”, and “I Need Thee Every Hour.”

After each of our studies we would be fed by either Alexandra and Marina, or by Eugenia and Olga. They would invite all to partake in each meal and there never seemed to be a lack of food. The hospitality shown to us by all was extraordinary. I am sure that it was quite costly to them, but they insisted every day that we eat with them. It was a privilege to be in their company and to witness Christians display this outward sign of affection towards each other.

Preparation Work

Due to the tireless efforts of Misha, we were able to accomplish some things that may help others who travel to Mariupol in the future.

1. Translators: we had met earlier with a teacher and some of her students at one of the local universities. During our final week we were able to use 4 of the students to help in translating. Misha was always present to help them and correct them if they made an incorrect translation. Hopefully, some of these students can be of use to future preachers and teachers.
2. Material: Shannon Shaffer had left some material when he departed for Russia. Misha was able to go through this material and we left much of it with the saints in Mariupol for their future study. The translators also translated some of my material. Misha looked at this as well, made corrections, and we left these lessons with the saints. Hopefully, the Christians of Mariupol will be able to use these aids as they continue to study God's word.

Words cannot adequately express the joy felt by all of us who were able to witness the power of God's word in Mariupol. We found the people to be open and eager to study more and more of God's word. I am extremely encouraged by the attitude shown by the 8 Christians in Mariupol. They desire to know more about God, they express a deep love for Him and for each other. Please pray that they will be strengthened and continue to grow in the grace of our Lord. Perhaps the best way to end this report to repeat what was heard by all of us so often during our stay: ***"Slava Boga!"***, or ***"Praise God!"***

Respectfully Submitted,
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IV. NOTES ON INTERVIEWS

NOTES ON OUR DISCUSSION WITH URI – TRANSLATED BY MISHA

Although not the oldest Christian in the church at Tula, Uri is one of the oldest attendees. He was with us when the church first started meeting in the public library, back before the government restricted religious meeting in public buildings. Our discussion with Uri was brief, but it was enlightening nonetheless.

We began by asking Uri how the church had been faring, before the Sunday in March when charges were made against Misha and Alex. He affirmed that the church was going well, and he wasn't sure, but he thought there had been more than 20 regular attendees before that Sunday. He also affirmed that Misha did a good job, that he was a good man, and that he liked Misha. He patted his shoulder as he spoke. (Emma had said that when she met Uri in the market a couple of weeks earlier that Uri told her only 7 or 8 were now attending church at the new place.) We asked how many attended this last Sunday, and he told us 7 or 8.

Uri was our first interview and a particularly important one. He had been one of those coming to Misha's for several weeks after the division. He had been one who said that he would continue coming (which confirms his good feeling toward Misha), so they were surprised when he did not appear anymore, and conversations at the market revealed he had gone back to "Ron's church." Let it be said here that no one seemed to express any hard feelings over his decision. More than one mentioned that Uri was a "pensioner" (retired) and that the church and Ron had been helping him. They thought, without malice, that perhaps Uri's decision was based more upon Ron's monetary support more than any disagreement with Misha. When we began to ask questions about what happened that Sunday, Uri began to become agitated. His voice got louder and all he would say is, "Ask Ron. I trust Ron." He repeated this three or four times.

We got absolutely no other information from him beyond the number of attendees. His head count alone was enough, however, to catch our attention. A report of this situation circulated by brother Jim Thayer made clear reference to the church in Tula early on being troubled and declining from the hypocrisy of Misha. Jim goes on to say that since Misha's marking and withdrawal, the church has rebounded and is stronger than ever, spiritually and numerically. Here and now I challenge those statements. I do not in any way question brother Thayer's integrity, but I do question whoever his source of information is. We found not one single person who stated the church in Tula was troubled where Misha was preaching. There were several who said it was at peace and growing, and no one (except his accusers) had anything to say but good about Misha Lapyonko. Again, I do not know the source of brother Thayer's head count. But by the word of Uri, who is attending there, and the fact that not a single member showed up for a "planned" midweek Bible study, I would say that Jim has been led down the path by someone. These clear facts bring into question, in my mind, the rest of brother Thayer's written assessment.

Carl McMurray

Interview with Vicka, translated by Sasha

(M=Mac speaking, elsewhere it is Vicka) last week of August, 02 by Carl McMurray

M-Vicka, I appreciate you letting me come over and talk with you. I was wondering if I could ask you some questions about what happened in the church, last March?

Did you want to ask questions or do you want me to just tell what happened and then you can ask me questions?

M- Well, go ahead and just tell in your own words what happened. That would be better I think, and maybe I'll have some questions later, or maybe not. We'll see.

The church was at peace. Misha did a good job preaching and everyone liked his preaching. Once in awhile Igor preached and once Roman preached. But Misha did the best job and everyone like his preaching. One Sunday Ronald Roark was there and the church was overflowing. There were many people there who were strangers, people who had never visited the church before. It was that day that Ron and these people started making charges and accusations against Misha. We...

M-Who is "we" Vicka?

The church. We didn't even want to hear these things because we came together for worship and to study. They said terrible things about Misha and they talked about his personal life, telling intimate things we didn't even want to know.

M-What kind of intimate things?

About his marriage and whether he had lived with his wife or not, or whether his divorce was for the right reasons. We didn't come together to hear this. After awhile even some people began to leave that place because they didn't want to hear about this. *(note:Misha's divorce over his wife's adultery had taken place approximately two years previous, mac)*

M-What were the accusations about?

Ron, and the others accused Misha of stealing money. I didn't want to hear this because I know Misha. He is a good man and a good preacher.

M-You don't believe Misha took any money?

I don't believe it. There were some there accusing Misha who don't even go to the church.

M-What was that?

There were people there who sometime later said they came to this church. But, Katya *(her 9 year old daughter, mac)* and I have been attending this church for four or five years every Sunday and have never seen them. *(I have pictures of Vicka and Katya and remember them*

being present each Sunday 3 or 4 years ago when last I visited, mac) maybe they might have come when I was visiting my brother in St. Petersburg, but as for always coming? No, I've never seen them.

M-Well, what happened when Ron and these others accused Misha?

“Ron called for a vote”.

M-Wait, what did you say? What happened?

Ron called for a vote to cast Misha out. To dismiss him and send him away from the church.

M-How did the vote turn out?

Almost the whole church voted for Misha. We did not believe he did those things that Ron said he did.

M-The whole church?

Just those strangers that Ron brought in. They voted against Misha, but the church voted for him.

M-What happened then?

Ron just suggested that Misha could still be in the church, be a member, but he would lose all his privileges.

M-Lose his privileges?

Yes. He would just be in the church still, but Ron would dismiss him from preaching. Ron said he would lose his money and his preaching privileges.

M-I don't understand. If the church voted for Misha, they believed him, how could Ron dismiss him?

(Vicka shrugged) Ron said he would stop Misha's support. He said that if Misha stayed he would take the money from the church.

M-You mean the money for the rent for the meeting place? Ron was paying for that and he said that he would stop that so the church couldn't meet anymore?

Yes, he said Misha couldn't be preaching anymore even though the church voted for him. Then Misha and Emma (*Misha's mother*) said the church could meet in their flat.

M-So the church supported Misha and went to their flat to start meeting there?

Yes, and when Ron and Igor left, they took everything.

M-What do you mean? What did they take?

They took all Bibles, songbooks, materials, everything. But this is what I would expect from Igor. I know him and I knew that he was not a good man.

M-So they took everything when the church moved to where Ron wanted it?

Yes. Ron has some sort of secret business. We just found this out during that discussion that day. I suppose it is connected to his business. They also were raising the rent on where the church met. Maybe it was good for his business to give this place to someone else who wanted it and move the church to his place of business.

M-What kind of business are you talking about Ron having?

I don't know. I believe Roman worked for Ron in his business. But we don't know anything about it. Maybe Misha knows.

M-So, Ron and Igor took the Bibles and everything and moved the church to Ron's place of business.

Yes, but Misha said, he demanded some few Bibles and some few songbooks because he said he had bought these with his own money.

M-So if the church was moved by Ron, who went to Misha and Emma's flat?

Almost all the church.

M-All?

Yes. Maybe some are not visiting the church anymore because of Ron's accusations. But at first, almost all came to Misha's because we believed Misha and we didn't believe those strangers or Ron's accusations. Misha said he did not do it and we believe him.

M-But I was there Sunday. Where are all the people?

After a few weeks some who came to Misha's went back to Ron. Some of them were receiving money from Ron and perhaps they were afraid of losing their money. (*Such as Uri, who we interviewed and who receives regular benevolent help, mac*) Others are on vacation and working at their dacha's. This is summer you know. They are gathering vegetables and fruits and potatoes. In September when the potatoes are done, they will return.

M-Will they know to return to Misha's? Will they know what has happened?

Oh yes. They know. This happened before the summer. They came to Misha's and Misha has all the phone numbers and calls them.

M-So the group of 7 or 8 that met at Misha's last Sunday is not the whole church?

No, there are many others who are away just now.

M-Vicka, was there any trouble in the church before March, before Ron came in that Sunday and accused Misha?

No. Everyone was happy with the Bible studies. Misha gives good preaching and the church was getting bigger. *(Note: my information is that the church attendance was in the upper twenties, bumping 30 from time to time before this happened, mac)*

M-Vicka, I have kind of a hard question. I was told that during that meeting in March with Ron, that Ron asked Igor in the meeting if Misha had stolen money from him. (Vicka is nodding her head yes). I was told that Igor said no. (the reason for my question is that Igor had signed a paper saying Yes, Misha stole money from him) Do you remember this?

I remember Ron asking Igor. Igor was like wine flowing (she makes a waving motion back and forth with her hand).

M-What? What does that mean?

First Igor said no, then yes, then no. He went back and forth several times. I could never understand a definite answer from him. He (Igor) told Misha that he would like to stand up and support Misha, but if he did, he would lose his money, his preaching job, everything.

M-What? Igor said that? How do you know he said it? (I had been told that Igor came to Misha later and admitted the charges were false with the above explanation, mac)

He said it in the church. Everyone heard it. Katya (her daughter) was sitting beside me on the couch during the interview. She was tugging on my sleeve and when I looked down, she said, "I heard it too."

M-Katya, you heard Igor say he couldn't support Misha because he would lose his money?

"Yes", Katya said, "and my friend heard it too. Everyone did".

M-What friend?

Vicka explained that Katya had been bringing a little girl friend to bible study on Sundays with her.

M-So everyone heard this?

Everyone! *(I'm wondering if Ron's Russian is good enough that he understood what Igor said in front of all)*

M-You said earlier something about Igor, about him not being a good man and doing things you were not surprised about. What did you mean?

He is not open about things. I have seen that he has bad thoughts in his head and that's why I just do not have anything to do with him. We did not want him to preach at the church and many will not go there if he preaches.

M-What do you mean? What things does he do?

Once, for example, he asked me to the café. He told me to keep his secret.

M-What secret?

He drinks vodka. He told me not to tell Misha or Ron. I won't go with him to the café anymore. I won't have anything to do with him. Another time he met us at a New Years party. He asked me not to let Misha or Ron know that he drinks. I think that he drinks all the time.

M-So Igor the preacher drinks?

Yes, and goes to nightclubs, and dances.

M-Does anyone else know this?

The people at church know it. That's why when Ron said Igor will preach we did not want Igor to preach. We wanted Misha.

M-You don't think Misha does these things?

No, of course not. Misha is a good man.

M-Vicka, I have another hard question to ask. I would not want to insult you for anything in the world, but it is a personal question that I won't ask if you don't want me to. Can I ask you a personal question?

Yes.

M-Vicka, you're a pretty girl, and an intelligent one, being a high school literature teacher and all.

Thank you

M-I need to ask you about your relationship with Misha. Is there now, or has there ever been in the past, any feelings between you? Any special feelings?

I used to work at the same school with Alex's (Seryogin) wife. It was she who first invited me to the church. I was already divorced at the time. Katya was little and she was the only child at church. I was friends with Alex's wife and still am. When Alex brings her to Tula from Moscow she always calls and we will get together.

M-By the way, what is your opinion of Alex and his wife (also accused with Misha, mac)?

I like them both. She is a good woman. She has always been good. But, after she brought me to the church I knew Tanya, Misha's wife. We became friends. Misha taught me and he was preaching. Misha baptized me. After he baptized me, he continued to preach. He gave Katya some English lessons. But there is nothing between us. There has never been anything between us except friendship. I have known him since 1997 (I believe that was the date she said, mac) and he has always been a good man.

M-Thank you Vicka, for letting me come into your house and talk to you about these things that have troubled the church. You have been a faithful Christian lady all these years and you are teaching your daughter about the Lord. And, you have been a good friend to Misha when he needed one.

End of interview

DICUSSION WITH VALLIA—SASHA TRANSLATING. Carl McMurray

This elderly lady had let us know she wanted to talk to us. Said she had questions. Her questions had to do with:

1. How could Ronald Roark come into the church and say such terrible things about Misha?
2. Shouldn't he have spoken face to face with Misha? Wasn't that what the Bible taught?
3. Why could Ronald, an American and not a member of the church here, make charges against Misha and dismiss him from preaching when the church supported Misha?
4. Why could he take away the place where the church met?

It wasn't much of a discussion. I believe Vallia wanted just to get these things off her chest with other Americans. She ended with two statements that are as close to quotes as I can recall.

1. I have known Misha since he was 13 years old. He would never take money or do what Ron accused him of. Anyone who would accuse him of that must be crazy, out of his mind.
2. I have been considering baptism and joining this church, but now I am in doubt. I'm not sure I want to be part of a church like this. What if Ron returns and does this again to the (the church meeting in Emma's home) church?

We assured her that we agreed with her thinking on these particular Biblical topics and that indeed she was right. It did sound crazy that outsiders should come into the church and make demands. We assured her that we were opposed to this, and we were not working for Ron, and we would help the church there anyway we could.

Misha's Story

What follows is Misha Lapenko's account of what happened regarding Ron Roark, the Tula congregation, and how it was that Misha Lapenko was "dismissed" from preaching by Ron Roark. Misha Lapenko recounted his story on August 24, 2002. *Joshua Creel and Shannon Shaffer were present.*

I. Prelude

- a. Misha noticed that beginning last year (2001) Ron Roark was not happy with the way things were going here in Russia. He expressed his displeasure about his business dealings and about the churches in Russia on several occasions.
- b. Jim Thayer, of Atlanta, GA, was supposed to start handling more of the work in Russia for Ron. This would involve Jim Thayer making more trips while Ron Roark would be making fewer. For some reason or another this did not come to pass, so Ron Roark continued making his trips to Russia.
- c. It was also during this time that Pavel, one of the preachers in Orel, was dismissed from preaching by Ron Roark. Apparently Pavel had been living in Tula and traveling to Orel. An apartment was kept in Orel, but this was more for appearances when American preachers came.
- d. Also during this time period, Misha and Ramon had an argument over some money.
 - i. During January and February of 2002 Ramon was not preaching, but was driving a truck for Ron Roark.
 - ii. Misha questioned Ron about this and Ron said that Ramon was "on his time."

II. Ron Arrives in March 2002

- e. Ron usually emailed his itinerary to Misha in advance, but this time he just showed up to one of the Bible studies. Said nothing to Misha about why he was there.
- f. Ron, Igor, and Ramon show up at Misha's flat one night. They had tea, but talked about very little. **No accusations were made!**
- g. Ron wanted to go to Kaluga. Misha said that Igor had the key to the apartment in Kaluga. Ron and Igor go to Kaluga, but they don't find Dima. They look at the apartment, and apparently Ron is satisfied.
- h. Ron preaches the first Sunday that he is there in Tula. Again, no accusations are made. The next Sunday, Ron asks Misha if he can again speak. Misha says "yes". Ron preaches and at the end of his lesson begins to make accusations against Misha.

III. Ron's accusations:

- i. Begins by saying that Misha has disgraced the name of Christ and must be dismissed.
- j. 1st accusation: Misha did not provide proof that his divorce was because of fornication. Says that Alex is one of his sources of information.
- k. 2nd accusation: Misha complained about the buses to Kaluga, but Misha allegedly had a car.

- l. 3rd accusation: Misha was stealing money from the preachers.
 - m. 4th accusation: Misha was not taking care of the brethren there in Tula. Unloving.
 - n. Ron spent ~ 1 hour making accusations. No mention of repentance or forgiveness.
 - o. Ron then allowed Misha to take the floor.
- IV. Misha's response to the accusations:
- p. 1st accusation: what evidence could he possibly provide that he divorced his wife for fornication? Did Ron want tapes, etc?
 - q. 2nd accusation: concerning his alleged car.
 - i. Misha asked Ramon if he had a car. Ramon said that he had two. However, one was Ron's, but Ramon's name was on the papers.
 - ii. Such is common in Russia.
 - iii. Misha said that his name was on the papers of some cars, but they belonged to other people. They let him drive the cars while in town, but not out of Tula, certainly not to Kaluga.
 - r. 3rd accusation: Misha denied that he ever took money from the preachers. They had some system where the preachers borrowed money from each other when bills came due. (Not clear on how this worked).
 - s. 4th accusation: being unloving.
 - i. Misha asked the congregation if any of them were unhappy with him. Had he been unloving?
 - ii. One person stood up, Lylia. Said that Misha would not help her family when her grandchild was in the hospital. Said that they were not from Tula and had no other friends.
 - iii. Misha said that Lilia moved to Tula 25 years ago and had plenty of friends. Misha had been busy, but Igor had gone to them.
- V. The Vote
- t. After Misha finished speaking, Ron called for a vote. A raise of hands.
 - u. Three voted against Misha: Ramon, his wife, and Lylia. There were over 20 people there!
 - v. Ron began with the accusations again.
 - w. Misha tried to calm everyone down, but Ron for the third time began accusing Misha. Ron pointed to Igor and said, "Misha took money from you, didn't he?!" Igor said "no".
 - x. At this point the members began to turn on each other.
 - y. Ron began accusing Misha yet again. At this point people started walking out.
- VI. The Aftermath
- z. Igor goes home with Misha. Tears in his eyes and says that he will back Misha up. Misha's mother was present.
 - aa. Igor has meeting with Ron and the other preachers. After meeting he comes to Misha and says that he had to join the accusers or he would lose everything. Tells Misha that if he would admit guilt things would go back to normal. Misha is tempted, but refuses.

- bb. Misha runs into Ron on the street. Ron tells Misha that if he will say Alex was the ringleader then there is a chance for Misha. Misha refuses, Ron becomes agitated and begins yelling on the street.
- VII. John McPherson and Byron Nash Arrive
 - cc. Misha meets them at the train station. Ron pulls up and tells them to stay at his place. Misha had already reserved hotel rooms. They go with Misha so that he can get his money back and then they will go with Ron.
 - dd. Friday: John and Byron meet with Misha for ~ 3 hours. Want to meet Saturday with Misha and the 5 preachers. Tell Misha to call them on Saturday.
 - ee. Saturday: Misha calls Byron after he gets off work. Byron tells him it is not necessary to meet. They will talk on Sunday.
 - ff. Sunday: After services John and Byron tell Misha that there is too much evidence. John will recommend that Perry Hill no longer support Misha. Misha tells them that he no longer wishes to have their support.

Ammendum: I sent a copy of the previous to Brother John McPherson of the Perry Hill Rd. congregation in Montgomery, AL. He wished for the following amendments be made:

1. The reason that he and brother Nash stayed in the place provided by Ron was in order to save money. It was not meant to cast any suspicion or mistrust on Misha.
2. Misha and Alex were invited to attend a meeting with the 5 preachers. Misha could not because of work.
3. Misha conveyed to Bro. McPherson that his heart was no longer in preaching and asked that Perry Hill Rd. discontinue his support. This request was made before Bro. McPherson had said anything concerning any recommendation that he might make. Thus, the decision was taken out of Perry Hill Rd's hands.

Respectfully Submitted,
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Conversation with Pavel (August 29, 2002), Tula, Russia

1. **Joshua Creel and Shannon Shaffer** requested that Sasha “the English speaker” call Pavel (~5:40 PM) to inquire about a midweek Bible study with the other group meeting in Tula. Josh spoke to Pavel at his home asking if the church still had a midweek study and Pavel said “sure” at 6 PM.
2. Joshua, Sasha & Shannon went to meet Pavel at the bus stop near the meeting place. Pavel met us with a man named Sergei who had a car. They took us to the meeting place which was only about a block away and Pavel showed us the building where they were meeting but explained that he had no key. Pavel said that Igor had gone on vacation and taken the key with him.
3. Pavel asked why we did not inform him of our coming to Tula and Josh explained that he did not know Pavel was in Tula but thought that he was in Orel.
4. Since we could not get into the meeting place we stood outside. Pavel spoke for about 15 minutes on John 15 while Sasha translated for Josh and I. There were only 5 of us present (Pavel, Sergei, Josh, Sasha, Shannon).
5. Following the study we walked over to Sergei’s car to talk. Pavel then encouraged Josh and Sasha to sit in the car with Sergei while he talked to me (in English) outside the car. Pavel began asking some basic questions about the number of trips I’ve made to Russia, where I was from, my age . . . Pavel then asked if I had heard of “the terrible thing that happened in the church in Tula.” I told him that I had heard some about the situation and asked him to tell me about it.
 - a. Pavel said that Misha and Alex stole \$45,000 US dollars from the other Russian preachers. I made sure to clarify the amount.
 - b. Pavel said Misha has a \$6,000 car.
 - c. Pavel said Alex has a \$70,000 flat in Moscow.
 - d. During our conversation Pavel mentioned that he had been “dismissed” from preaching in August of 2000 because Misha and Alex said some “bad things” about him.
 - e. I asked him, “what things?” Pavel kept saying that he didn’t know.
6. Being uncomfortable with the split conversation arrangement I ask that we all talk together. At that time Josh and Sasha got out of the car and Sergei left.
7. Josh and I asked Pavel some questions. We used Sasha to translate the questions and answers to avoid misunderstanding.
 - Q: How many people meet with the church here?
A: 5-15 sometimes 20, but not too often.
 - Q: Where are the other people this evening?
A: I don’t know?
 - Q: Do you preach here in Tula?
A: I am the part-time preacher.
 - Q: Are you getting support to preach?
A: Yes, \$200 per month.
 - Q: Where do you get that support from?
A: Ron Roark
 - Q: How do you get the money?
A: I have a card to draw it out of the bank account.

- During this conversation Pavel made reference to Alex owing him \$600.
 - While Pavel was preaching he said he called Ron and explained his need and Ron said he was sending the money to Alex and that Alex was to give the money to Pavel.
 - Pavel said he called Alex and Alex said he never received any money from Ron for Pavel.
8. Pavel explained that he sells used computers to help support his family.
 - f. Pavel described how he had obtained 3 computers for the church for which Ron Roark had agreed to pay Pavel \$1,500. Pavel said Ron had only paid Pavel \$1,200 and still owed him \$300.
 - g. Pavel expressed his displeasure in talking to us because he could be out selling a computer at that time. But, he was “wasting time” talking to us.
 - h. Pavel also said he had not received his support for preaching for August (\$200) and he was concerned.
 - i. Q: How much do you make selling computers? A: Some months \$2,000 some \$1,000
 - j. Pavel said there was supposedly some sort of problem with computers which he had sold the church so Pavel didn’t know what his “status” was with the church.
 - k. Pavel wondered if the computers were going to be returned or if Ron Roark was going to pay Pavel the remaining \$300.
 - l. Q: (Shannon) If you are making that kind of money selling computers, why are you concerned about \$200 for preaching support? A: none
 9. Our discussion seemed to be degenerating at that point into a lot of accusations from Pavel, most of which concerned money.
 10. Pavel described how he met Jim Jonas and liked to talk to him.
 - m. Pavel wrote the church where Jim preaches asking for support and the church said they did not have the money to support Pavel at the time.
 - n. Pavel said he did not believe it so he quit corresponding with Jim.
 11. Pavel grew increasingly irritated during our conversation.
 - o. Pavel said, “Don’t you have eyes?” saying we should be able to see some things about Misha and Alex just by looking at them.
 - p. Q: (Shannon) “What things should we see or be looking for?”
 - q. A: (Pavel) “I can’t tell you if you can’t see.”
 - r. Q: ***How do you know that Misha has a \$6000 car and that Alex has a \$70,000 flat?***
 - s. A: (Pavel) ***I hear rumors***
 - t. Q: ***You mean that rumors is your only form of evidence?***
 - u. A: (Pavel) ***In Russia, rumors are the best kind of evidence.***
 12. Our conversation began to draw to a close as we walked to the street corner.
 - v. Pavel said: “Things will never change in the church here.”
 - w. Josh asked: “What things?”
 - x. Pavel would not give any specifics.
 - y. I (Shannon) asked: “Who runs the church here in Russia and tells the Russian preachers where to go preach?”
 - z. Pavel: “Ron Roark.”

13. Just before we departed I tried to encourage Pavel to realize that neither Ron nor anyone else should be “running” or trying to control the church in Tula. The members of the church in Tula needed to make their own decisions based on the word of God.

14. End of conversation.

V . FINANCIAL REPORT

The following congregations and individuals had fellowship in the financial support of this trip. They are listed below in no particular order and my deepest thanks go to each and every one.

Cambridge City church of Christ, Cambridge City, IN
Brownsburg church of Christ, Brownsburg, IN / Shoals Bluff church of Christ, Minor Hill, TN
Danville church of Christ, Lake Butler, FL / Brooksville church of Christ, Brooksville, FL
Gordon Skinner, Paoli, IN / Etta Roberts, Clermont, IN / Ken Kaufman, Indianapolis, IN
Nicole Hunt, Brownsburg, IN / Margaret Crump, Beaufort, SC
Kenneth & Wanda Robinson, Athens, AL / Bill & Jeanne Sullivan, Tampa, FL
Jenny Reed, Lakeland, FL / Charles Blackwelder, Lake Butler, FL
Paula Claridge, Columbia Falls, MT / One wished specifically to remain anonymous
Paul Shreve, Westerville, OH / Mike & Linda Ferrell Reynoldsburg, OH
Johnnie Elliott, Nashville, TN / Loella Akers, Nashville, TN

TOTAL FUNDS CONTRIBUTED BY THE ABOVE... \$7347.00 FUNDS WERE USED IN THE FOLLWING MANNER...

\$1,877-Round trip tickets and preparation (2 visas, mailing, photo's, passport renewal)
280-food
699-lodging
150-communication (in-country and via email/phone to U.S.)
1,200-travel (taxi, train, in-country plane, & includes extra trip exp. after being deported)
166-translating
1,900-benevolence (given specifically, by hand to Christians, also includes church cont.)
175-miscellaneous (tips, hospitality gifts, thank you's, copies, office supplies, etc)
200-personal (designated as such by contributors)
700-leftover and brought home *

\$7347-TOTAL

* *PLEASE NOTE*: If assisting in this effort caused undue hardship on the part of any of the above contributors and you need some of this leftover funding to be returned, please contact me personally and that will quickly be arranged. Your assistance was still greatly appreciated. If I do not hear from anyone, there is still some work to do. My personal design for the above leftover funds are to (in order of priority)...

- 1) Fill requests for Bibles, Songbooks, tracts, and study materials that were made by Christians in Tula, and Mariupoul.
- 2) Assist the church in Tula with the cost of chairs, and the church in Mariupoul with a communion set.
- 3) Assist Alex Seryogin, in Moscow, with the publication of study materials or songbooks in Russian.
- 4) Add a section to my web page, EvangelismUpdate.com, that would carry tracts, song sheets, lessons, and Bible study materials, all in Russian, that would be available for study and download anywhere and at any time.