

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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