

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

AUGUST 2014, SUMMER ISSUE

TRANSCARPATHIA, UKRAINE

Blessings and Peace!

Greetings! We trust this letter finds you well and enjoying the daily richness of life that is ours in Christ. We hope that you had a blessed and enjoyable summer as we will soon be watching the days grow shorter and turn to autumn. Season after season, year after year, we continually see God's faithfulness abide through good times and bad times.

Many times this year we thought of Job and took comfort from his words in Job 1:21.

We recently returned from Ukraine and we are currently spending two weeks in Michigan visiting family and friends and taking care of doctor appointments. This has followed a shorter than expected stay in Ukraine. Typically we travel to Ukraine in January following

Christmas, stay until August and work the autumn months in North Carolina. As we mentioned in the previous newsletter, I, Eric, was unexpectedly diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma this past winter and we had to return

Job 1:21

of the radiation treatments we returned to Hungary at the end of March and to Ukraine in the beginning of April.

It is our hope and prayer that we can, through God's grace alone, serve the people of these Eastern European communities in both Hungary and Ukraine. We hope to bring glory to God, serving Him in obedience to further His kingdom. We hope

to the U.S. for tests and radiation treatment. Following the completion

OUR MISSION

International Christian Community Development seeks to bring God glory through obedience to the Great Commission given to us by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In humble service, through God's grace alone, we strive to set a Christ-like example, promoting a Biblical world view in an effort to encourage the seed of faith to not only grow but to flourish. Through teaching conversational English, leading Bible studies, promoting a local orphan project, and organizing a Roma Sunday school program, we seek to build relationships with those we serve, pointing them towards Christ. Recognizing that we are in fact foreigners, we work with and partner with local Pastors, teachers, churches and organizations to support their efforts and outreach.

this newsletter provides you with an update concerning the work God has called us to in Eastern Europe, as well as the current situation in Ukraine.

Back in Ukraine: It was a very busy spring and summer. We were richly blessed to have rewarding and effective summer camps this year. We had a terrific group of volunteers from different places and walks of life who helped with the camps. We hope that you will enjoy reading about our work in Ukraine and Hungary and the ways the Gospel is being proclaimed.

Arriving back in the U.S. in August left us excited to be here and to see family and friends, yet it also leaves us missing our home in Transcarpathia, Ukraine and the people we have come to love and call friends and family in Christ. It is a good time to reflect on the past months, looking back on God's faithfulness through good times and through trying times. We experienced both this year. With the dog days of summer passed or never materializing here in Michigan, with night time temperatures already in the low 40's and the first hints of fall color painting the leaves, the hot long busy summer days we had in the Carpathian Basin of Hungary and Ukraine seem further away than time or distance allow. Adjusting back and forth between

two very different cultures can sometimes prove to be one of the more challenging aspects of our lives.

We have often been reminded this year that the plans of God are not the plans of man. I would have never believed it if I was told at the beginning of the year that over the course of 2014 our personal plans and lives would be turned upside down by a cancer diagnosis. I would have never thought the cobbled stoned streets and city squares of Kyiv, Ukraine's capital city, would run with blood and the smell of death. I would have never thought governments would be toppled and war would ravish the country that in many ways feels like home to us. Many things can change in just a half year. We have been reminded that God is sovereign and in control. His will is supreme. Our faith is to be planted firmly in Him and Him alone, and not in ourselves.

A New Ride: Upon arriving in late March, our first task was to search for and purchase a van to replace our 1989 Volkswagen van that died last summer. The search went quickly and within a week we had bought and completed the

paper work on another Volkswagen van. This van, also a 1989, is yellow and in much better condition than our previous one. The van has served us well in the first months of having it. It needed some transmission work and has had a few other issues to



deal with. Overall, we are very happy with it and excited to use it, hopefully for years to come.

Weekly Bible Study:

One of our highlights of the spring was a seven week Bible study we were able to hold in Beregszasz, a city of about 30,000, about 30 miles from our home village of Peterfalva. In past years when we have done a Bible study it has been attended by mostly university students. This year the LORD blessed the weekly Bible study and it grew significantly. Over the course of the spring we routinely had 15-20 people come for the Bible study and it became more of an international group than just a university group. A number of

Dutch nonprofit workers, living in Ukraine, joined us and the university students for the Bible study, as well as a number of German young people who were living in Ukraine for a year of service volunteering. We were so thankful for this opportunity to meet so many young adults and students. We continually marveled at how incredible it was for so many people from so many cultures and languages to come together to worship the Triune God.



Conversational English:

Over the course of the spring we enjoyed teaching English conversational classes in two different Hungarian Reformed high schools. One in our home village of Peterfalva and one in a second Hungarian village about an hour drive away, in the village of Nagyberég. Time was short following our late arrival, but we enjoyed developing relationships and teaching English to many high school students in these two

villages. Many of the students we knew from previous years and it was good to get reacquainted with them.

Sunday Night Hymn

Sing: Every Sunday night in the Peterfalva Reformed High School we organized an English

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, **not giving up meeting together**, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Hebrews 10:24-25

Hymn/Praise Song evening. It was well attended by students. Some students would come who liked to sing, and some who enjoyed learning English through songs. We also had great personal enjoyment from the evening as singing is one thing we miss most while being away.

School Life: In Peterfalva we live just a short five minute walk from the Reformed High School enabling us to spend time there in many settings and extracurricular ways. We often

enjoy sharing meals with the students and the staff and this spring we were also able to help chaperone a class trip to the nearby Carpathian Mountains. The Carpathian Mountains, rising out of the plain of the Danube basin, can be seen in the distance from Peterfalva, often appearing a beautiful blue, purple color in the evening light. They are one of the last remaining wild areas of Europe, a place where bears and wolves still roam. Ancient traditions, skills and traditional dress still live on among the Hutsuls and Rusyns, the ethnic Slavic speaking people inhabiting the mountains. A short 2-3 hour drive makes the mountains a wonderful place to go hiking and take trips with students. These trips always provide time to get to know students outside of a classroom, and we thoroughly enjoy these trips.

Easter: We enjoyed a visit from Stacey's parents this past spring. It was a highlight of the spring for us. It was great to be able to see them and to show them Ukraine, our home and our work there. They came at Easter time. Easter is always an interesting time to visit, a time rich in color, food, and steeped in

traditions and fellowship. It is an important religious time for many, but it is also a time that shows us the need for the gospel in Ukraine and throughout Eastern Europe as the contrast between holiday rituals and a living faith is very apparent.

International Student Program: Over the past few years we have been able to develop a relationship with two high schools in the U.S. who are willing to accept and sponsor students from the Hungarian Reformed High School of Peterfalva. We are very thankful and grateful to both Northern Michigan Christian High School in McBain, Michigan and Pella Christian High School in Pella, Iowa for their willingness to accept our students and work with us in this program. The concept is to have a student from Ukraine spend ten months studying in one of the high schools and living with a Christian host family. It is our hope and prayer that these students will grow in their faith through this experience and that they will use the skills and language ability they gain from this experience to build up their home communities in Ukraine. It

is our hope that these students return to Ukraine to be leaders of their communities, schools, churches and families. We have already seen the return on this investment as these students have returned to Ukraine and assisted us in English camps, Sunday school programs for Roma (Gypsy) children, and in organizing Young Adult Bible studies and inviting people to come to them. Last year we were able to have a student in both Michigan and Iowa and this year we are again excited to have a student at Pella Christian High school.

Summer Camps: Our summers are always busy and filled with camps and hosting volunteers. It is by far the busiest time of year for us but in many ways the most rewarding as well. This year our camp season stretched from the first week of June until August 1. We were involved with five different camps this year. Some are English themed camps, some are more outreach camps, and one was a Vacation Bible School camp. Here is a short synopsis of each camp:

1. Peterfalva Reformed High School - this is our first and

longest camp, and also possibly our most difficult camp as we are responsible for organizing every detail of it. This year we had around 60 students who are all enrolled in the Peterfalva Reformed School. It is an English camp, but we also focus on outreach and encouraging the students to grow in the faith, as not all students come from



Christian back grounds. Daily devotions, Christian-service projects, and a camp theme of loving and obeying God and loving and serving your neighbor are incorporated into the camp in an effort to share the gospel and build up the faith of the students. Following breakfast and devotions, mornings are spent in English classes with the students. We require every student to spend one afternoon doing a Christian-service project in their local community. The students can choose between visiting elderly in the village, taking part in a VBS afternoon with local

Roma (Gypsy) children at a nearby Roma camp, or picking up trash along the Tisza River. The afternoon hours following lunch are spent doing service projects as well as some group games and activities. Evenings are spent doing group games and competition events with the students. We had an excellent group of volunteers this year, both local volunteers and volunteers from the U.S. We are always looking for help and volunteers for these camps, if you or anyone you know are interested, please ask for information about next year's camps. We would love to have you come. In the coming weeks, please also see our website for additional pictures and a more detailed account of the camp.

2. Nagyberg Reformed High School - was the location of our second camp. This was new for us as we were asked only in May if we could help out with this camp. The camp was only one week and our primary task was to teach English. We worked with the local Reformed High School and their staff, as well as a number of native English speaking volunteers. We

hope and pray that like the first camp we were able to set a Christ-like example in encouraging their faith to grow.

3. Vachartyan, Hungary - is a small village about 20 miles northwest of Budapest. We have for six years worked with the Hungarian Reformed pastor of this village in organizing an outreach camp for middle school up to university aged students.



The camp is an English camp but much of the day is spent in worship and singing, as well as extensive devotion times. Every day is a combination of English lessons, singing and devotions, and games. This year around 40 students came for the camp. We have been encouraged over the years how many students return every year, many of them who are not coming from Christian back grounds and profess their faith in Christ after experiences they have had at the camp. We are also encouraged that

Barnabas (the Reformed Pastor) and his wife Livia have an active youth ministry that many of the students from the camp continue to seek the LORD after the excitement of camp has ended.

4. Beregszasz, Ukraine - is a city about 30 miles from Peterfalva. It is a city we go to for groceries and to go to the market. It is also a city with a Hungarian university that, despite being in Ukraine, is funded by the Hungarian government. The past two years we have been involved with this university doing weekly classes, taking part in special events like Shakespeare Day, and also doing a short summer English camp there. Last year and again this year we did a three day summer English conversation camp with students from the university. This year was a little different as we spent two days with students and one day doing a seminar with local Transcarpathian English teachers. We praise God that, despite it being a secular university, we are able to share our faith, talk about God, and openly answer questions as to why are living in Ukraine.

5. Tiszabokeny, Ukraine- is a neighboring village of our home base of Peterfalva. A kindergarten for Roma (Gypsy) children has been established in this village to minister to the Roma children of both Tiszabokeny and Peterfalva. The majority of Roma children live in poverty, come from broken homes, and do not regularly go to school or do not go at all. We partnered with a church group from the Netherlands who came to organize a one week Bible camp with the children. The children heard Bible Stories and lessons, learned memory verses, played games, and did crafts. We provided transportation, and local helpers and translators for the camp, as well as assisted in the daily running of the camp. It was, to be honest, quite a difficult week. Structure and discipline is not something the Roma children are used to and many days it seemed chaotic and challenging. Differences in culture were apparent and we hope in future camps that we can find local Roma adults who may be willing to take a leadership role. We hope and pray that this camp was a blessing to the children and



God will use it to plant a seed of faith in these young children.

Our Sincerest Thanks:

Thank you for all your support and prayers this year. We are humbled to be serving God in Ukraine and Hungary, and we pray that God will continue to use us there. We are excited to continue working with young people in both Ukraine and Hungary and we hope and pray that we can be a Christ-like example, sharing the gospel and encouraging the faith of the next generation of leaders in Ukraine. Thank-you for the prayers and support that so many of you have shown us during this year with Eric's cancer diagnosis. We could not be working in Ukraine without you. We continue to ask for prayers as we await results of tests to see if the cancer is completely gone. We also ask for prayers for Ukraine and that peace will prevail there and the war and violence will end. Please also pray for the people

we work with as so many see only a hopeless future and uncertainty due to the political situation in Ukraine. Please pray for these people as daily life for many is a struggle, but more importantly, please pray for a spiritual revival in Ukraine and that the church will grow and flourish and that God will use the church there in great ways. Please also pray that God will take down racial barriers and walls separating communities in Ukraine. We plan to work the next months in North Carolina and then to return to Ukraine, God willing, and if health allows, in January. Please also see our website at www.iccdabroad.org for more detailed accounts of the summer and pictures in the coming weeks. May the LORD bless you as you live for Him!



**In Christ,
Eric and Stacey Hoeksema**