TRANSCARPATHIA, UKRAINE
Blessings and Peace! Áldás békességet!

We hope that this newsletter and update on our work in Ukraine and Eastern Europe finds you well and enjoying the freedom that is ours in Jesus Christ, and the joy that is ours as we walk daily with Him. The warm and humid days we experienced earlier this fall in North Carolina have turned to brisk autumn nights. Light fades a little every day and the calendar assures us of the coming of winter and the passing of another busy but wonderful year for us in Eastern Europe. Season after season we are continually reminded of God’s faithfulness and of His provision for us in all situations; through both good and difficult circumstances that we experience in life, God’s faithfulness and His Word remain a constant Rock on which to stand upon. Cooling temperatures and falling leaves along with news of the season’s first snow in the Midwest make it difficult to reflect on the warmth of summer. It also is a reminder that after a very busy autumn, we were delayed in getting this newsletter out. We praise God for the incredible experiences and opportunities that the summer of 2015 held for us and we hope that through this letter to update you about our work this past summer in serving God in Eastern Europe.

We returned to the States in August for a series of doctor appointments, to visit family and friends, and to work for a few months in North Carolina. As many of you know Eric has been twice diagnosed with Non-Hodgins Lymphoma in the past 18 months. We left for Ukraine last January following a month of cancer treatments and we came back to the U.S. in August for checkups to determine the results and effectiveness of those treatments. After blood work, CAT and PET scans, and a biopsy the oncologist reported that no cancer could be found. We praise God and are very thankful for His healing hand and a clean report of health. Eric has also been diagnosed in recent years with cardiomyopathy and an August echocardiogram and a visit to the cardiologist has shown marginal improvement in heart functions. We would like to thank all of you who have been praying for us during these challenges in the past couple of years.

The arrival of summer changes our lives dramatically. Gone are the weekly conversational English classes and clubs, weekly Bible studies and outreach programs that characterize our winter and spring months in Transcarpathia, Ukraine. Gone too is the stability of having a home and living among neighbors and friends in our home community of Peterfalva, Ukraine.
Graduations and exams fill up the months of May and June for students and our work and ministry change focus from working with students within school walls and schedules to working with students through a series of summer English and Gospel outreach camps throughout the summer months. In 2007 we worked with only one camp at the Peterfalva Reformed Lyceum in our home village of Peterfalva, Ukraine. Over the past 8 years God has opened many doors and provided many new opportunities. We marvel at the Lord's work, for this past summer we were able to conduct 6 different English and outreach camps in three different countries. We praise God for these many opportunities to tell of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and share our faith with hundreds of students and young adults taking part in these programs.

Organizing camps and activities and living out of suitcases, calling a new place home every week can be tiring and exhausting, but the opportunity to connect and develop relationships with hundreds of young people, sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is ultimately far more rewarding. It is really humbling that the Lord can use us in such a manner as this! Summer camps have proven to be a very successful tool in our ministry and outreach to young people in Eastern Europe.

The following is a breakdown of the different summer camps we had this past summer. Please also see our website for pictures and information on these camps.

Nagyberg, Ukraine; June 7-12. Our camp season began with a one week camp at a Hungarian Reformed boarding school in the village of Nagyberg, Ukraine. Approximately 120 students attend this boarding school and took part in this camp. While we have worked with the Nagyberg Reformed Lyceum for many years, traveling there during the school year for weekly afternoon English classes, a summer English camp here is relatively new to us. Last year we were asked to come and help with a summer English camp for their students and we have enjoyed partnering with them for the past two summers in this endeavor.

A typical day at English camp began with breakfast and devotions led by volunteer English teachers. Mornings, stretching into early afternoons consisted of six different 45 minute blocks for English classes. Students receive English grammar lessons throughout the year so during our camps we focus our English lessons on conversation, giving the students an opportunity to listen to and understand native English speakers, allowing them to practice speaking English. English lessons involve various topics from Bible and faith themed lessons, to history, cultural, and geography lessons about English speaking countries. Singing, games, role plays and skits also form an important part of daily English lessons encouraging students to practice and use English in fun and informal ways. Following afternoon free time and study halls, a time of activities and games helps the students to use energy before supper. Following supper we have a second daily devotion period led by volunteer English teachers who share their faith and stories from their own life with the students. Days close with free time for games, Christian themed movies, and visiting. A special thanks to Andras Mako, Agnes Garanyi and the rest of the Nagyberg staff for their efforts in organizing and making this camp a success.

Peterfalva, Ukraine; June 14-26. Our longest and original English camp occurs in our home base, the village of Peterfalva. Peterfalva is where we have been living and working for years in Ukraine. Like Nagyberg, Peterfalva also has a Hungarian Reformed boarding school which was started by the Hungarian Reformed Church following the fall of communism. The church has set up these institutes to provide a Christian education as well as a superior education for hundreds of students in Transcarpathia, Ukraine. Both of our camps at the two boarding schools are part of the school curriculum. Following the conclusion of the school year in the end of May the students must take part in both English and a Ukrainian language camp before their two month summer vacation begins in end of June. We have enjoyed partnering with these schools with
language camps and it has been an excellent means for us to meet and form relationships with students, sharing the Gospel and love of Christ with them. The LORD has blessed us with our 9th anniversary of English camps in Peterfalva. Our daily schedule in Nagybereg is modeled after our camp in Peterfalva, so I will skip to two aspects of the Peterfalva camp which make it unique among our summer schedule.

Having two weeks with the students allows us to include two special features to the schedule. During the course of the two week camp each student must take part in an afternoon service project in the local community, emphasizing Christian Servant Leadership. Service projects and local outreach is something many of the students have never really thought about or experienced before. We hope and pray through the experience of these afternoons that the students will develop a servant’s heart motivated out of a love for Christ, and an awareness of the needs in their own community. The students were able to choose between three options: A Vacation Bible School afternoon in a local Roma (Gypsy) community, an afternoon of visiting, praying and singing with widows and elderly of the community, and picking up trash on the banks of the local Tisza River. It was a rewarding experience for us to see the students embrace these opportunities, leaving behind their comfort zones to venture into activities and places they have never been or seen before. Especially rewarding was to see the students involved in the VBS outreach to the Roma who for many traveled for the first time into Gypsy camps, leaving behind racial stereotypes, to interact and witness to children in these outlying and forgotten muddy corners of their communities.

The second unique aspect of the Peterfalva Camp is that we have the time to organize all the students into sports and activity teams. The teams compete daily against each other in sporting activities and events. They compete in trivia competitions, skit night, ultimate Frisbee, scavenger hunts, relay races, water balloon volleyball and other activities. The students enjoy these competitions to determine a camp champion. We enjoy this camp and the opportunity to interact and be a Christ-like witness to these students. Thank-you to Irenke Kalanics, Csaba Toth, and the rest of the Peterfalva staff for partnering with us during these two weeks.

Tiszaujvaros, Hungary; June 29-July 3. Our third camp of the summer was an English/outreach camp in the city of Tiszaujvaros, Hungary. This was the first year we have done a camp at this location and the story of the origins of this camp is worth taking a moment to tell. In February this past year we had chaperoned a group of students from the Peterfalva high school to Budapest to take part in a Bible competition. On our return to Ukraine on a cold dark late winter night our van broke down along the highway in eastern Hungary. We called a friend who searched the Hungarian Reformed Church directory for the nearest Hungarian Reformed Church. Our friend called the pastor who ventured out in search of us and towed us back to his church. They very graciously provided accommodations that night for 9 people and provided us with supper and breakfast. After worshipping with them the following morning we were able to return to Ukraine with a van borrowed from another friend who came to our aid. The pastor in Tiszaujvaros also arranged for a mechanic to fix our van the next week.

The assistant pastor at the church shared with us that they came to know the LORD and developed a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through an English
camp, and wanted to begin an English/Gospel outreach camp in their community. We were invited to come back in the summer for a week long camp. God’s purpose and providence were evident that cold wintery night. It was a testament and a reminder that through trials and hardships God is sovereign. We praise God for this opportunity to work with the Tiszaujvaros congregation and to be able to share our faith and build relationships with 30 young people from this community this past summer. Please see our website for pictures and information on the programs we did during this week, as well as the interesting history about the origins of the city name, Tiszaujvaros. A special thanks to Aranka Uzoki, Martin Varga, and Andrea Kadar-Fekete for their help and partnership in organizing this camp and for their incredible hospitality throughout the week.

**Vachartyan, Hungary; July 4-11.**

The summer of 2015 marked the 10th anniversary of English/outreach camps in this small town nestled into hills along the Danube River 30 miles northeast of Budapest. This was the seventh consecutive year we were able to partner with Pastor Barnabas Ferenc Gerely and his wife Livia in organizing and ministering to local youth in their communities. Barnabas has been using these camps to witness to the youth of his church congregations and the surrounding communities. We praise God that we have seen the continued development of faith in many young people who have come back year after year for this camp, and others who have met Barnabas and Livia and become part of their local youth group. This camp is primarily an Evangelical outreach camp and secondarily an English camp. Attending students come by foot, car, and train to Vachartyan daily from 9am-4pm taking part in three conversational English classes, as well as three different periods of devotions and singing interspersed with lunch and time for games, activities and fellowship. In this camp, like all of our camps, lessons are all focused on conversational English, incorporating role plays, games, songs, Bible and faith into the lessons. Barnabas and the English camp volunteer teachers take turns every day leading devotions, giving testimonies, and sharing the Gospel with the students. A special thanks Barnabas and Livia Gergely, Orsi Gelle, and David and Grace McBrier for partnering in this camp to make it possible.

**Vorosmarty, Croatia; July 13-17.**

This past winter we received an invitation from a friend to travel to Croatia to work with a local pastor there in organizing a Vacation Bible School Week for children in local church congregations and communities. A piece of background history: Following defeat in World War I, the country of Hungary was divided up and the majority of its territories were given to neighboring countries. In Transcarpathia, Ukraine we live in such an area among Hungarians living in a region of Ukraine which used to belong to Hungary and has a large minority population of Hungarians. Other neighboring countries such as Slovakia, Romania, Serbia and Croatia also have similar communities of Hungarian minorities. Vorosmarty is a small village in north eastern Croatia in the region of Slovania in the heart of the Hungarian minority communities of Croatia.

Unlike the other camps, this was not an English camp, but exclusively a VBS week. We brought a team of university students from Ukraine with us and worked with two local pastors and their wives in conducting this camp. Around 20-30 local kids and teenagers came daily for Bible lessons, skits, crafts, sports, activities, and lunch. We again praise God for this opportunity to share God’s grace and love with the youth of these communities. A special thanks to Pastor György and Agi Varga and Pastor Attila and Eva
Kettos for working with us and hosting us during this camp.

**Carpathian Mountains; July 27-29.** Throughout the spring and winter months we have been invited to spend one afternoon a week teaching a conversational English class in a local university in Beregszasz, Ukraine. Beregszasz is a large city of Transcarpathia near the Hungarian border, which is home to the Rakoczi Ferenc Magyar Foiskola (Rakoczi Ferenc Hungarian College). The head of the English faculty at the college has asked us the past three years to conduct a three day summer English Camp with students majoring in English at the college. Many of these students we see throughout the year in weekly English classes and some of these students also make up the core of students attending our weekly Bible Study throughout the winter and spring months. We relish the opportunity to spend a few days with them in the summer at this short English camp.

Normally this camp consists of merely a few hours a day at the college in a class room. Thanks to a grant from the Zondervan Foundation of Grand Rapids Michigan, we were able to move this camp off location to the Carpathian Mountains for three days of lectures, English lessons, hiking, and eating meals together. It was a great opportunity to spend long days getting to know these students instead of just seeing them for a couple of hours in a class room. We hope and pray that God will use our humble efforts as we strive to show Christ to these students in the hopes that they come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

We would like to thank all the people who helped us this summer in volunteering for our summer camps. They spent countless hours organizing, teaching, translating, spending time with kids and partnering with us to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with hundreds of young people in three countries this past summer. Thank-you to Heather Kaemingk who spent over two months of her summer laboring with us in all of these camps, and thank-you to Eva Pandy, Gilbert Markvoort, Wiebke Bartels, Mara Rehfinger, Andrea Kovacs, Boglarka Orosz, Krisztina Sarkozi, and Blake Gelderman who spent anywhere from 1-4 weeks working with us on many of these camps, giving of their time and sharing their gifts to work in Eastern Europe and sharing their faith with so many people. We would also like to thank Norm and Carol Bomer who graciously came and spent time with our university students teaching them about art and literature motivated out of a love for Christ.

Please contact us if you or any one you know would be interested in volunteering and taking part in these camps in the summer of 2016. Please also see our website for pictures, and additional stories as well as information on next summer.

Thank-you for your continued prayers and support. We could not be here in Eastern Europe serving in this calling without your encouragement, prayers and support. We are thankful for the many opportunities that the Lord has provided this summer, as well as health and safety in the frequent travel. We are thankful to God for the many relationships we have been able to make and the opportunities we have had. We are excited to be based here in Ukraine and to continue serving the Lord here and in other parts of Eastern Europe in the summer months.

Please keep us in your prayers as we are finishing up our time here in the U.S. We are very thankful to all the people who have provided us work and lodging this autumn. We have been very thankful to be a part of our home church communities while being back here in the States.

Finally, pray that many will be reached with the message of the Gospel and come to know Christ, as well as for traveling mercies as we prepare to return to Ukraine December 21. Thank-you for your continued support and prayers.

We hope you all have a blessed Christmas as we celebrate the birth and incarnation of Christ.

To God be the glory!

Eric and Stacey Hoeksema

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