

# INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

MARCH 2017

## TRANSCARPATHIA, UKRAINE

Blessings and Peace to you!

**Greetings!** We trust this letter finds you well and enjoying the daily richness of life which is ours through the grace of Christ. We hope you had a blessed year thus far as winter turns to spring and we incredibly find ourselves in the month of March already. In this letter, we hope to provide you with an update. 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, and bring glory to God, serving Him by sharing the Gospel and love of Christ to many in these communities who are in need of hearing this Good News.

**Transcarpathia:** While living in Ukraine we live and work among a minority Hungarian population in the most westerly province of Ukraine, Transcarpathia or Zakarpats'ka. This region of Transcarpathia is also populated by many Roma and has a majority



Ukrainian population. We work primarily with the Reformed Hungarian population, but we have been enjoying increased opportunities and are excited by God opening more doors to serve and minister to both Roma and Ukrainians. This area has a long and storied Calvinist heritage, which will be celebrating the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation this year along with Calvinist churches around the globe. There is a small and struggling bastion of the Reformation here in Eastern Europe. Protestant churches and the more numerous Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches continue to struggle with nominalism, increased secularism and worldliness, as well as splintered homes and families.

**The Newest Member of the Team:** In early January, we returned to Ukraine after a longer than usual stay in the U.S. due to the birth of our son, Hans. What a blessing Hans has been to us! As his name suggests, he is "a gift from God" and an answer to prayer. Hans is a Dutch/German name and short for Johannes. Johannes is Dutch/German for the English

## 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. 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.

equivalent of John; in Hungarian, "Janos", and in Ukrainian, "Ivan".

We were thankful that Hans traveled very well coming here. He slept and watched all the activity on the airplane. He had difficulty adjusting to the time change and for the first weeks had difficulty sleeping at night. But now we can report that he has completely adjusted to the time change and life here. We have not been so

active with our blog or website in the past year with the pregnancy and birth of Hans, but we hope this year to be much more active in blogging, so we hope you will continue to follow along with what is happening here.

**Returning to Ukraine:** It has been an exciting return to Transcarpathia, Ukraine with the whole family. We have been warmly received and have been overwhelmed by the generosity of friends and neighbors here. It has been a busy month of January settling in and getting organized. We have enjoyed beginning English lessons and Conversational English clubs.

**English teaching in Peterfalva:** Shortly after returning in January we once again began having weekly English lessons at the Peterfalva Hungarian Reformed boarding school. As in years past, we are living in the small village of Peterfalva and the proximity of the school makes it very easy to go there two afternoons a week during the study halls for extra conversational English lessons with interested students. We enjoy these times with the students. It is a fun and relaxed setting to study English, play games and get to know the students in a better way. The students stay at the school every other weekend, and we have appreciated opportunities to offer some weekend programs for the students as well; Saturday game nights, and Friday night English movies. These informal settings also give us an avenue to

reach out to students and develop relationships with them.

**English Teaching at the Foiskola:**

The nearby city of Beregszasz lies just 20 miles away from Peterfalva and yet, it takes over an hour to reach it. Yesterday, I calculated my average speed on a trip to Beregszasz to be 18mph. This says nothing about my driving, and it says nothing about traffic conditions in rural Ukraine. It says a lot about the conditions of the roads following the thaw of winter. Disintegrating roads and seemingly ubiquitous potholes give the road a lunar quality and at times make them nearly impassable. A ruined tire has been our only casualty yet this winter, but I suspect other repairs will have to be done in the future from the continued beating from the road. The road is familiar as we travel it often, and despite the difficulty of getting to town we enjoy the programs we have there. On Wednesdays, starting in February, we began to teach a weekly English lesson at the Beregszasz Magyar Foiskola. This is a college that is supported by the Hungarian government to provide higher education for Hungarians living in Ukraine. It is great to have English lessons here with students who have a very high level of English and these classes give us wonderful opportunities to meet students and invite them to other activities such as Bible Studies and Bible Retreat weekends. Many of our Bible study and Bible retreat participants are students from the Foiskola.

**English Club:** A second event we have weekly in Beregszasz is an English club that we run through a Transcarpathian culture club. We have two clubs every week, back to back on Wednesday evening. One club is for children (aged 6-14) and one is for adults (15 and above). These clubs have been very well attended and we enjoy them despite the challenges. The children's club has a wide range of ages and skill. There are 14-year-old linguistic geniuses who are fluent in English and 6-year-old children who know no English at all and are too terrified to say anything. Planning the lesson to cater to all the participants is challenging. The adult club has been a smoother ride. Every week we have been seeing 10-12 adults who are motivated and wanting to learn English. We have enjoyed getting to know them personally more and more every week. We praise God for this opportunity.

**Roma Kindergarten:** Working among the Roma brings both joys and frustrations. Often times we find within ourselves feelings that are far from Christ-like; judgmental and exasperated, annoyed or even angry. Many times in a week, sometimes several times a day, Roma come to our door asking for money or food. Some have let



themselves into our house uninvited. Then there is also theft. This past February, a bag of chicken that I had placed outside to thaw was taken from our front porch. Apart from feeling frustration towards these people who ask with such a demeanor that can be perceived as entitlement, there is also in us a sense of helplessness at the overwhelming neediness that these people possess. Incidences such



as these can leave a disagreeable taste in one's mouth, and cause a sort of ungraciousness and an attitude of indifference to well up in us. We need reminding that the Roma are image bearers of their Creator, just as we are, and no less so. Their most basic need is also ours. They stand in need of Christ and His redemptive work on the cross on their behalf, just as we do.

It has been a blessing to us to be able to go to a local Roma Kindergarten once a week with students from the local Peterfalva Reformed high school to lead a Bible lesson and prayer, singing and a Bible memory verse, activities and crafts. Our team includes Eric and myself, as well as 7-10 high school students. About 20-25 Roma children wait eagerly for us to arrive. Students take turns leading the Bible story followed by

a couple of questions as to what the story teaches us. The children are eager to recite the Bible memory verse and to answer the questions. To see our students from the high school bending near to these little ones, intently speaking or listening to the Roma children is really beautiful to see, and a sweet reminder of what it can mean to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

**Roma Outreach:** For a third year in a row thanks to a grant from the Zondervan Foundation we have been able to organize another outreach to the Roma in the city of Beregszasz. This is an English/Bible club that takes place every Monday in a Roma school near the city's Roma camp. Students come for an afterschool program that consists of devotions and prayers, games, an English lesson, singing and a snack. The school's director has asked if the students can learn something in English to perform at a special ceremony that will be taking place on April 8 (International Roma Day). Csilla, one of the university students who leads, along with the others are teaching the students to recite the Lord's Prayers for the International Roma Day celebration. One of the most exciting aspects of this club for Stacey and I, is that we are only



overseeing it and five university students are planning, organizing, and conducting it. It has been good to see their enthusiasm and perseverance for this program. They do a great job and we are thrilled to see this develop more and more as the semester goes on.

**Looking Ahead:** We have been excited to begin a new Bible study with university students in Beregszasz following the exam period and the start of the spring semester; more will follow about this Bible study in the next newsletter. This time of year also involves a fair amount of planning for our summer English and Outreach camps. We are looking forward to the coming months not only for the summer season and outreach opportunities, but for upcoming weekends with university students and young adults. We are looking ahead to a Spiritual Retreat weekend, a weekend filled with Bible Study, prayer, singing, and serious conversations about life in Ukraine, coming in the middle of March. We are looking forward to another weekend in May for our third annual Bible Retreat weekend. We are excited to see many new faces sign up for this weekend and many returning faces too. We hope and pray it will be a wonderful weekend of studying God's Word and encouraging students to walk faithfully with their Savior.

There is a familiar phrase: Home is where the heart is. This phrase is maybe overused, over simplified and cliché. But many things are

cliché for a reason, because there is an element of truth to it. With a loving family, friends, and a church community, home can be where the heart is. Is home a place where you lay your head at night, or is home where your heart is, or is home a cultural identity, or is home a homeland of sort? Maybe the question of where home is or the definition of home are not really meant to be answered from an earthly perspective. As Christians, life on this earth is temporary, here today and gone tomorrow. Our lives are but a blink of an eye on the pages of history while we wait for our true home, our heavenly home with Jesus Christ. We are citizens of heaven eagerly waiting to be united with Christ in our heavenly home. As the Apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 3:20-21, *"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."*



We are thankful to you for your continued support, encouragement and prayers. We are thankful to God for what He is doing and accomplishing here in Transcarpathia.

**Items for Prayer and for Praise:**

- **We are thankful to God that we have settled in and that Hans has adjusted well to the changes that living here brings.**
- **We are thankful to God for the many opportunities that He continues to provide for serving and ministering to the people of Transcarpathia.**
- **We are thankful to God that we continue to remain healthy. We pray for continued energy as we will become increasingly busy into the spring.**
- **Pray that we would be always ready to give an answer for the hope that it in us (1 Peter 3:15).**
- **Pray that the Lord would bless the university students who are leading the Roma Outreach with wisdom and kindness as to how to show the love of Christ to the Roma children and teenagers who attend the weekly club**
- **Please pray for the Spiritual Retreat this coming weekend, that those who attend would be uplifted and refreshed in their faith and daily walk with the Lord.**

**To God alone be the glory!**

Eric & Stacey,

and Hans Hoeksema



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**Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 1**

Q: What is your only comfort in life and death?

A: That I am not my own, but belong--  
body and soul,  
in life and in death--  
to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven: in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.

Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.