

## INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

IF ANYONE HAS MATERIAL POSSESSIONS AND SEES A BROTHER OR SISTER IN NEED BUT HAS NO PITY ON THEM, HOW CAN THE LOVE OF GOD BE IN THAT PERSON? DEAR CHILDREN, LET US NOT LOVE WITH WORDS OR SPEECH BUT WITH ACTIONS AND IN TRUTH. 1 JOHN 3:17-18

We trust this letter finds you well and enjoying the daily richness of life which is ours through the grace of Christ. 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 to further His kingdom.

Writing on a cool rainy autumn day as colors change and fade is evidence that summer vanishes a little more with each passing day. It is a good day for reflection and recollection of the warmth of a summer spent in the Danube Basin of Hungary and Ukraine. It is a good time for looking back over the summer and recalling the ever present blessings being poured out from our Heavenly Father, that are ours in Christ Jesus and to recognize God's handiwork in our lives. It is a good day for reflecting on good times and hard

times and reminding ourselves that we are nothing in our own strength and all things come from our sovereign God above and are in His control.

This past August we returned home completing another tour in Ukraine and Hungary. We spent a few days in Michigan in the end of August and are currently in North Carolina. It is good to see family and friends in the months that we are home. The past few years it has been our practice to arrive in Ukraine in January and to stay until August. We returned to the U.S. for the autumn months to work in North Carolina. Eric has been working in agriculture helping with corn, soybean, and cotton harvests, as well soil sampling. Stacey has a job as a waitress at a local café. We hope this letter gives you a report on our time spent in Hungary and Ukraine and to update you on our current activities and future plans.

## MISSION STATEMENT

It is our aim to acknowledge Christ as preeminent in all things and through God's grace alone, to build relationships with high school and university students who will soon form the newest generation of leadership in their communities, families and churches. Humbly, 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 work with and partner with local Pastors, teachers, churches and organizations to support their efforts and outreach. We thank you for your support and prayers, for without your kindness and generosity we could not serve here. We give praise to God alone for the work which He accomplishes.

The Ukraine and Hungary, like much of the U.S. and Canada, have four very distinct seasons. Cold snowy winters followed by the warmth of spring turning into hot dusty summers and concluding with the harvests of autumn. Our work changes somewhat with the seasons. Our winters and springs are spent in activities we have described in earlier newsletters. We concentrate on Bible studies with University students, conversational English classes and extracurricular activities with high school students at two local Hungarian Reformed schools, working with abandoned babies at a local hospital, teaching a class at a local college and working with Roma (Gypsy) children through Sunday schools and kindergartens. Much of these activities conclude in the end of May with the exam period and conclusion of the school year. With the onset of June begins a busy summer season of organizing summer camps and hosting volunteers from North America who come to teach and help us with summer camps. It is marked by a summer on the road, traveling between camp locations and showing visitors around Eastern Europe and our home away from home, Transcarpathia, Ukraine. It is also a time of year that we look forward to greatly: spending time sharing the Gospel and encouraging the growth of faith of hundreds of youth in Hungary and Ukraine and enjoying the company of friends, family and acquaintances coming for the camps.

After much preparation throughout the winter and spring months, our first camp begins in mid-June. For two weeks every June we organize a two week camp in Peterfalva, Ukraine. The camp takes place with students of the Hungarian Reformed High School located in Peterfalva, Ukraine. This is the school we have worked closely with over the past years. We praise God

for another successful English camp this past June. We were blessed with a great group of volunteers from North America who graciously came and helped us during these two weeks teaching classes and assisting in organizing games and events. We were thankful to the LORD for an injury free camp and aside from the typical warm summer weather, ideal weather conditions. It is our hope and prayer that, not only did the students learn English, but more importantly their faith grew through classroom dialogue, singing and daily devotions.



Thanks to our volunteers!

The following paragraphs give an idea and picture of what the camp is like. A typical day began with a time of prayer and encouragement with the teachers before breakfast. Following breakfast and morning devotions with the entire student body, the mornings were filled with five consecutive forty minute class periods. The aim of the classes was to provide students with an opportunity to speak with native English speakers and to interact in English through diverse lesson plans, topics, and classroom activities.



Service Project: Visiting Elderly Widows

Afternoons were spent in a variety of activities: singing English worship songs, group events, and partaking in a service project in the local community. We talked in class about the parable of the Good Samaritan and on different occasions talked about what it means to love your neighbor. With this theme in mind, during the course of the two week camp, every student was required to spend one afternoon taking part in a service project. They could choose from three options. Students visited elderly in the village, where they would sing songs, pray, visit, and read the Bible with them. Students took part in a Sunday school program with Roma children, singing Sunday school songs, teaching Bible stories and memory verses, and organizing games. The third service project was cleaning up the yard and garden to an abandoned home that will be the future location of the Roma kindergarten. We were proud of the students, for their diligence and willingness to take part in these activities. They worked hard and did a good job.

In the evenings, following supper and a second group devotion, was another time of activities. We organized the students into teams which they competed in events during the two week camp. A

village wide scavenger hunt, skit and talent nights, a trivia night competition, water balloon volleyball and relay races were among the activities the students competed in.

A day away during the middle of the camp was also enjoyed by most. It was a nice opportunity to interact with the students outside of the classroom. We had a warm but beautiful day to take a trip to the city of Munkacs to visit a medieval Hungarian castle and then to travel on to the nearby Carpathian mountains to see a lovely waterfall and to do some hiking in the mountains. Many people were harvesting hay in the mountains. Wagons of hay pulled by horses and hay stacks dotting the mountainside provided a beautiful back drop to the day.

The last day of the camp consisted of a closing program where the students performed English songs and Bible skits they had learned during the camp. The student body, school teachers and a few attending parents all enjoyed seeing some of what the students learned during the camp. It was a very nice closure to the camp and following all the good byes we headed back to Budapest to take some of our guests back to catch a flight.



Eric and his English Class

Our second camp took place June 30 - July 6 in a small village 20 miles outside of Budapest. This camp, unlike the school setting of the first camp, took place at a church where youth aged 13-20 would travel from their homes in the surrounding towns every morning to come and attend the camp every day. We organize the camp in cooperation with a Hungarian Reformed Pastor and his wife. Many of the students coming for the camp do not come from church backgrounds, Christian homes or Christian schools. It is our goal to use the English language as an outreach over the course of this camp to build relationships and present the Gospel to these young people often navigating through their teenage and young adult years without the regular influence of church or God-fearing parents.

As in our first camp in Ukraine, a typical day in the camp consists of periods of English classes and activities. Activities and games are used in the English classes but we also have times of large group games and activities with all the students. Hungarians are very musical and the students enjoy frequent and long segments of singing hymns and songs of praise following devotional periods. The students are all on summer vacation and return home every evening. Since this camp does not take place at a school we along with the other volunteers enjoy staying with a Hungarian host family throughout the time of the camp. This camp also ends with a closing ceremony that parents and family are invited to come and attend to see what the students have learned through the course of the camp.

We praise God that through the work of the Holy Spirit we have seen many students return year after year showing deepening spiritual maturity and a growing faith. The pastor we organize the

camp with also reports to us that he has seen an increased attendance throughout the year in his weekly youth Bible Study from students coming for the summer English camp.

Our third and final camp this summer took place back in Ukraine in the middle of July. We were invited by a local university to organize a three day English camp with the students from their English department. This camp was with students more advanced in English than the prior camps, allowing for new opportunities and new challenges. Although the university was a secular school, we were free to incorporate the Gospel and our faith into the classes. We were thankful for this opportunity, however brief, and we pray that we can build upon the relationships we made with these students we met this summer.

#### FIVE SOLAE

1. *SOLA FIDE* - BY FAITH ALONE
2. *SOLA SCRIPTURA* - BY SCRIPTURE ALONE
3. *SOLUS CHRISTUS* - THROUGH CHRIST ALONE
4. *SOLA GRATIA* - BY GRACE ALONE
5. *SOLI DEO GLORIA* - GLORY TO GOD ALONE

We were very pleased with how the English camps went this year; we had an amazing group of volunteers who did a terrific job. We are indebted and grateful to each of them for taking time to come and help us with this year's English camp. We hope and pray that through the efforts of these English camp, that the students not only learned English, but more so, were presented with the message of the Gospel, and challenged to grow in their faith. We are so thankful to the

volunteers for setting a Christ-like example before the students. We are also thankful to the local pastors, English teachers and school staff: dorm parents, janitorial staff, and the cooks at the school who daily provided us with great meals of delicious Hungarian cuisine.

At the close of these camps, we must give all the praise and glory to God. We are so thankful for the prayers, encouragement, and support that we receive from our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are already thinking ahead to next year. We will again be in need of people willing to give of their talents, their time, and their energy to serve as teachers for the English camps in Ukraine and Hungary. We encourage you or anyone you may know to prayerfully consider this opportunity to serve in Ukraine. Please visit our website or contact us for more information regarding the camps for the 2014 year.

We have been encouraged by the continued success of an exchange student program. This year we were in contact with Northern Michigan Christian School located in McBain, Michigan and Pella Christian High School in Pella, Iowa. Both schools were willing to accept and enroll students of ours from Peterfalva, Ukraine. The experience for both students and the schools has been a good one thus far. It is our hope and prayer that these students will use the experience of living with a Christian family, attending school, and the English they have learned, to continue in their education and careers, but moreover, to build up their families, communities, and churches back in Ukraine. Students who have studied in the past have been very valuable to us: serving as translators for groups/volunteers, organizing and hosting Bible studies, and working in English camps.

Our last weeks in Ukraine this summer ended on two sad notes. Since the winter of 2005, we have been involved in a weekly program of sending girls from Peterfalva Reformed High School to care for abandoned orphaned babies in a local hospital. In March we were told we could not come because the hospital was under quarantine. After the quarantine was lifted, we were still denied entry. Following much inquiry, the hospital finally said that they had a new policy and we would have to submit a very detailed application for approval to be allowed to continue this program. This is a typical attempt at extorting a bribe, and unfortunately for the time being, ending this program at this hospital.

The last week of July also saw the end of our 1989 Volkswagen van. I bought it in 2005 and for the past 8 years, it has faithfully provided transportation needs, but unfortunately the engine went out and the costs of repairing the engine exceed the value of the van. It was a sad day for us to see that van go, but we are thankful for the Lord's gracious provision in meeting all our needs in His time.

Once again, we would like to thank you for your encouragement, support, and prayers. We are very humbled to be serving the Lord in Transcarpathia, Ukraine. Please keep us in your prayers as we spend these autumn months working in North Carolina and as we prepare to return to Ukraine following Christmas. Please check out our website for camp information for our 2014 summer camps, photo galleries from last year and updates as time allows. May God bless you and keep you.

In Christ,

Eric and Stacey Hoeksema