

June 19, 2021

Greetings from Ukraine !!!

Mark asked me to drop you a note and let you know how things are going. I (Laura) got back safely to Ukraine on May 8th and we had a few days in Kyiv together. But as always things are busy



NEW INITIATIVE:

On Monday, May 10th, I met with Yaroslav and Arthur from Christian Global Support (CGS) and gave them an update on all my contacts with the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) while I was in the US. Before I left for the US, I visited a Ukrainian prison in Zhytomir, where I spent time with the Warden then presented to his leadership along with a question/answer period. It went really well and they were inspired and lifted up.

You see, here in Ukraine, prison workers are considered lower than the tax collectors in Jesus' day. They are not respected and they are paid at the bottom of the salary scale. And most importantly, they are in desperate need of encouragement and support, which gives us a wonderful opportunity to share the Gospel and Jesus' saving grace.

On June 4th, Friday, I met with the Director of the Department of Criminal Execution of Punishment (DCEP) along with his head of Finance, Human Resources, Intelligence, Juvenile Detention and Public Affairs up in the capital, Kyiv. We had hoped for a 30-45 minute meeting but God gave us favor and we met for almost 3 hours ! Essentially, the meeting was an interview of me and my expertise, and how I can help them, as an ex-Federal Bureau of Prisons employee and as the International Coordinator for Christian Global Support (CGS). Our expectations for the meeting were exceeded ! The DCEP are meeting with Yaroslav and Arthur for some clarification this Friday and they will be issuing a formal proposal for cooperation.

One of the biggest focuses of reform the DCEP is interested in, is resocialization (re-entry) of inmates back into the community. Amazingly, my last 13 years with the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) was as the CEO of community interactions, which included half-way (or rehab) centers. They were extremely excited to hear of my history and expertise in this area.

Since then, Arthur and Yaroslav did meet with the Director of the DCEP again and reviewed a few things. The DCEP issued a set of questions on topics they are interested regarding the American Bureau of Prisons. Additionally, they asked if I would create a plan for topics that I can teach at a training or seminar to DCEP staff.

Currently, we are working on a letter the DCEP will issue to the BOP identifying me as their Liaison.

How exciting to be a part of history here in Ukraine !

CLIENTS/REHAB CENTER:

Unfortunately, when God works the enemy is full of fear of what He will do and stirs the pot.

Just hours after returning home to the center, we had a big issue with some clients who were drunk. During Mark's 4 days in Kyiv to pick me up from the airport, the 2 leaders were compromised and items sold for alcohol and cigarettes. Every man drank and all but 1 smoked. We dismissed 3 men, one who was seriously drunk and combative. Just an hour later, one of our leaders died. Cause of death was heart failure due to stress (the drunk man tried to attack him but Mark intervened); I tried CPR but his death was instantaneous. A very new client left the next morning. We did a lot of talking with the remaining leader client, but in a few days, he chose to drink again and we dismissed him. Our hearts were broken over the whole situation, but God renewed our strength and we trust that He has a plan in it all.

So having no clients, the 1st time ever in 12 years, we decided to take a sabbatical for a week. We got things cleaned up, reorganized, and though we had a lot of physical work (laundry, animals, gardens, etc...) we really enjoyed the time with no clients (no watching for what they were doing, no organizing work, no teaching, no checking & rechecking on them, no living in a fish bowl, etc.).

After the week, God brought in some new clients. One, an older man (84) who really needs a nursing home (not homeless or an addict), then two hard working and very cooperative men who are ready to learn how God can change their lives (thank you God !). Unfortunately, after 3 weeks the older man decompensated mentally and wanted to go to his granddaughters; we were able to give the family some contact information regarding medical homes (their form of a nursing home).

ANIMALS:

Our 6 sow and 2 boar piglets are growing fast and we should be able to breed them end of this year. Our big boar recovered from a serious bout of worms and we were able to sell him. We added 40 5-8 week-old chicks to our chicken flock. Amazingly, we have chickens sitting on eggs and already have 4 little chicks; we have tried this before but the chickens didn't cooperate – now they did it on their own. We have two geese and two turkey-ducks sitting on eggs as well. Just recently we've had 6 mama rabbits give birth to bunnies ! On average there are 6 to 14 bunnies to a litter.

GARDENS:

Sveta's Garden (rented): we have harvested grass & alfalfa already. We are paying her with rabbits.

Luba's Garden (free use): we have harvested grass already.

Oleg's Garden (rented): we have harvested alfalfa once and the potatoes there are doing well. We paid him in money this year at he requested.

Back Garden (free use): we have weeded the red beans and are almost done weeding the acre + of fodder beets. We will be planting pumpkin in a few spots. A section of it used by others last year, we have this year and have planted grass but the first cutting was mainly weeds. Mark will spray it with herbicide & fertilizer to help the grass take hold. This garden is back behind our house garden so it is easy to get to & cut fresh grass for the animals.

Babba Garden ('babba' = grandma; we bought from a grandma 4 years ago): This field had alfalfa and grass for many years but in the last 3 years we have tried other crops. The alfalfa has very very deep roots (9 feet plus) and so keeps coming back and overtaking the crops. This year we are/will spray it several times with RoundUp & work it with the tractor in order to fully and completely kill the alfalfa, grass and weeds and soften the dirt more (as it is so hard).

Kitchen Garden (in front of men's bunk house): already harvesting parsley, dill, radishes, lettuce leaves, & celery. Beans, okra, early cabbage and basil are growing well.

Home Garden: completely planted so just weeding now. First harvest around the end of June will be the winter garlic. Later the winter onions and carrots. Other crops: squash, tomatoes, cucumbers, red beans, & red beets.

FEEDING MINISTRY:

As our guests continue to come in high numbers (around 50), we will continue to feed weekly. In past years, we've stopped just after April when the numbers dropped to around 5 (as it is not feasible time and distance wise).

Two weeks ago, 2 drunks became very unruly & demanding, so we chose to stop feeding, pack up and leave. The next week one of them came back and apologized; the other hasn't been seen. No doubt some street-justice occurred as their actions prevented many from eating that day. Through this situation we got to talk more with the other guests, give grace and forgiveness to the one who apologized, and show that nothing can scare us away from the calling God has on our lives (many thought we wouldn't come back).

Since the homeless population is pretty transient, we have this issue every couple of years when someone new on the scene tries to control the feeding. Stopping, packing up & leaving sends a strong message and fixes the situation. Unfortunately here, kindness is often seen as weakness, so we are the first example of strong or tough love they encounter.... calm firm love.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and share our joy & struggles. We want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for continuing to pray and support our ministry to the lost, outcast and unseen.

Love in Christ,

Rev Mark & Laura Bohanan