

## Holiday Update - Heart of Ukraine Ministries

Merry Christmas (Dec 25<sup>th</sup>), Happy New Year, and Merry Christmas (Jan 7<sup>th</sup>)!!!

Things have been extremely challenging these past two months (Nov & Dec) and we have learned to trust and rely on the Lord at a deeper level in so many ways. Below are some of the Challenges we have faced, along with a bit on the Holidays here, as well a few of the Big Blessings we have seen.

### CHALLENGES:

An ongoing challenge has been our computer. In November we shared that our computer had locked up and we feared all was lost. With much prayer and determination, Mark was able to get the computer up and running without having to erase the hard drive. I was especially excited as I have years worth of information on the computer. With this scare we began to make copies of many things on disks and flash drives. We started with the pictures, which are irreplaceable and then started with some files. Well in the process the computer locked again and Mark wasn't able to fix it. After his hospital stay (see below) Mark worked with a friend, Misha D., and computer guru here to try and get the computer running again. This time we were not so fortunate and we lost tons of information, historical files, etc... as the hard drive had to be wiped and the programs reinstalled. Unfortunately, Misha has informed us that our 6 year old laptop has a fatal error and it will again work itself into locking up. We are storing everything on outside sources now and leave the computer to operating programs only.

These computer problems have proved quite the challenge in getting information out to everyone. On several occasions I'd have blogs typed and be ready to move them to the flash drive and it would lock up and I'd lose it all. Frustrating to say the least . . . to see hours of work slip away, Oh my ! I tried going to the Internet Café to get the work done but that has also proved a great challenge. There are five (5) Universities and several colleges in Vinnitsya (which is smaller than Sacramento) and finals hit in mid November and went thru December (Their Christmas is Jan 7<sup>th</sup> here). One day I waited for over two (2) hours to get a computer and then the one I got, it's Word program didn't work and it's keyboard liked to stick (I looked up once and saw over 70 'o's !).

We've felt like Satan was attacking our communication processes in order to maybe isolate us (especially during the holidays) and to keep us from sharing all the wonderful and amazing things God has been doing. We ask that you pray for this specifically.

Another challenge was Mark being admitted to the hospital. One Saturday evening in early December Mark felt a funny sensation in his lungs when we were leaving some friends house and a few hours later he was in bed with the chills and a high fever. This continued for four (4) days, with his temperature reaching 39 and 40 C (up to 104 F). His symptoms seemed to suggest a sinus infection so I went to the Pharmacy and spoke with my friend Oxana and got some antibiotics and other medications for him (Yes, the system is very different here. Pharmacists are almost like Physician Assistants behind a counter). He improved a little but continued to have a very high fever (lots of warm

baths to cool him off) and he ate barely a cup of food a day. On Tuesday late afternoon, I was being a pushy wife and trying to get him to eat something. While he was at the table he began to see stars and I had him sit on the floor. He wouldn't lay down though, but thankfully I was able to grab his sweatshirt and lower him to the ground so he didn't bang his head, as he passed out !

Through a friend (Eugene) who works with the Vinnitsya City Government, we were able to get a Doctor to our house the next day (they do house calls here !). After a quick exam she (not just a Doctor but a Director of Doctors!) said he had to go to the hospital. Eugene transported us in a city car and medical staff were waiting for us when we arrived (what service – not typical at all for here). They processed him within five (5) minutes ! They were drawing blood from his finger for some tests and the lady was milking Mark's finger like a cow and he started to see stars again. Not thinking that no one would understand, I told him to sit on the floor. When everyone saw him going for the floor they thought he was passing out and it was like a 5 Alarm Fire ! He was transported on a gurney to his room with the rest of the testing waiting for later. Mark was put in the VIP room in the hospital (still not like an American room) and was treated by the Director of that wing. Throughout the entire situation and 10 days in the hospital, we were blessed abundantly and God showed His faithfulness and care for us. For more information, watch for our coming blogs for December. Mark was a bit weak for a few more weeks but he's back to his old self again.

**THE HOLIDAYS:** We were not sure what to expect during the holidays here but we enjoyed the festivities with eyes wide open, watching everything. New Years is the big holiday here and celebrated extensively. We also learned that gifts are given then at not really on Christmas . . . . so many of our friends were really surprised to receive our gifts (cookies in a jar) on or just after Christmas. Our future blogs will share more on the festivities and how they are done here; different and interesting. We also found out that Ukrainians LOVE fireworks . . . . for weeks before and after New Years ! !

#### **BIG BLESSINGS:**

1. Late November, I (Laura) was asked by Eugene (noted above) if she would be interested in tutoring English for a daughter of one of the city workers, which I was. Upon meeting with the woman who works for the government, I learned it was none other than the Director of Finance ! Of all the people who work for the government . . . hummmmm wonder what God's got going here? Her daughter Olya is a Hemotologist (blood expert) and is preparing to teach at the large medical University here and she must teach in English (lots of international students here – over 6,000). I am picked up by a driver every Tuesday and Friday for a two tutoring session and then am taken by the driver to where I need to go afterwards (Choir practice on Tues and English Class on Friday). This also brings in a little extra money every weke

2. Before Mark went into the hospital we were invited to a meeting at the Vinnitsya City Hall with the Director of Human Services (Andre R) and a Councilman on the Human Rights Committee (Uri), along with the Director of Social Services (Sveta), Director of International Relations (Toma), and a number of others. We invited two of our friends to sit in on the meeting and give us feedback afterwards. Well we were in for a few surprises !! The news media were there in full force with Channel 5 TV News and numerous reporters from magazines and news papers !!! The meeting was in a conference room with tables in a circle and we, along with our friends were placed at the table along with all the city representatives. I had prepared a one page handout of some basic information about a Homeless Shelter/Rehab Center which had been translated by Toma's office. After everything got settled and microphones and recording devices were in place (and Andre had read the handout) Andre started and gave the 'party line,' then came a few others and then us. As each person spoke the microphone and recording devices were moved in front of the person. Unexpectedly our friends were also called to speak. They were Stepan a Pastor from a village just outside Vinnitsya and a Deacon – Misha from our church. They both did well and although surprised at having to speak were glad to do so. It was made very plain during the meeting that there has never been a meeting like this in the history of Vinnitsya (or many other places) where city government workers and Christian church leaders were at the same table discussing social issues (apparently they tried a meeting in the past with an Orthodox Priest and it did not go well at all; but never Christian leaders). The meeting ended with Andre directing all the government workers to find a building that would be suitable for such a program and that we would meet again.

Prayer Concerns: 1) That the government doesn't try and control everything which will result in the same old things happening; 2) that the Christian churches in the area join in fully in the work; 3) that trust can be built between the government and the churches and that they can work together, each operating within their own responsibility and realm and not trying to control the other; 4) that Mark and I can prepare outlines of center rules, inspection guidelines of the program, etc... and that they can be translated accurately, so we are prepared for the next meeting(s) and can effectively guide the development of the center.

3. Another blessing was that for Mark's hospital stay we paid for nothing !!! Apparently our Visa Emergency Insurance (500g or \$100) and the City of Vinnitsya paid for everything . . . . the VIP room, the medication, etc.... God is soooo good !!!

We ended 2007 with the last five months being in Ukraine. Can you imagine that? On January 25<sup>th</sup> we will have lived in Ukraine for ½ a year ! Wow does time fly !

We pray that you had a wonderful Christmas that was filled with the love of family, peace from the Prince of Peace, and the knowledge of what Christ truly came as a baby for . . . our salvation. Isn't it amazing? He came knowing what would happen to him, but His love for us kept him submissive to the Father's will and He died in our place on that cross so many years ago.

Love in Christ,

The Bohanan's