

Trip to Vancouver - March 9-12, 2007

03-17-07 by Laura Bohanan

With each day that passes, we see God's hand in our plan to move to Ukraine. When we took the step of obedience last June when God was finally calling us to move there, we began to see Him work in mighty ways as He laid out our path. Our trip to Vancouver, WA, is just another example of God's preemptive work.

We left for Vancouver Thursday evening, driving a few hours and then sleeping in the back of our van at a rest stop. And for those of you who know me and my light sleep and 'hearing the ants crawling' ears I slept deep and restful . . . amazing . . . and only from God. Anyway, as we headed to Vancouver we had no real plans. We had not been able to set up any speaking engagements or any meetings. We were going first and foremost to spend time with our beloved friends Misha & Irena Dubinskiy and their children Mark (2) and Abby (6 mo). They took us on our first mission trip to Ukraine and we have so deeply missed them since their unforeseeable move to Vancouver.

Despite what we think or expect, if we listen and follow His leading, God always has a plan. After a wonderful time of rest and fellowship late into the night Friday and then Saturday morning, God started the ball rolling.

Misha and Mark decided to go hear an Australian man who was speaking at one of the Slavic churches on financial management and wealth. The seminar was interesting but God had set up a divine appointment. While there they met two men who have a ministry in Daninsik, Ukraine, to street children. Misha and Mark returned to the house full of excitement and with a DVD of their work there. What heart wrenching pictures and songs (English and Russian Versions) that were on the DVD. It was really neat to hear about their ministry. They also have started a Drug/Alcohol Rehabilitation Center in their area. They had many questions for Mark about our work in Vinnitsa Ukraine.

While the men were away, Irena fed me tons of information on whose who, addresses, phone numbers, etc.. of people in Vinnitsa that we knew, those we should contact, and even some people in Sacramento. Irena is our 'Networking Queen.' That's the job God has given her in this work and she is gifted at it.

Later that afternoon we got to speak to a lady, Nina, who is going to let us rent her apartment. It was great to hear her voice and talk with her in person . . . her broken English and my broken Russian. What a saint to let us rent her place for the cost of utilities; not a dime for personal gain as she wants to support God's workers.

That evening we got to meet David & Nina Franklin. David is American and Nina is Ukrainian. They will be moving to Ukraine late this year to start up a food ministry in Nina's home village about one (1) hour north of Vinnitsa. We had a great time of fellowship and of sharing ideas.

Just our 2d day into the trip and it's like God is showing us the others around who are called and working in different ministries that go hand in hand with what we will be doing. Mark and I have had to really work at staying focused on what God is calling us to do because we see so many needs in Ukraine. It's like God is reassuring us that He has it all planned out and that we must do our part while He takes care of the other parts through other workers.

I think Sunday was one of the longest days we've had since our trip to Ukraine. After staying up late, despite the Daylight Savings time jump, we got up early and were at the Ukrainian Baptist Church. We listened to two (2) good sermons as well as different musical presentations and poem readings, which is pretty traditional. Misha translated for Mark and Irena's niece Angelina Karpenko translated for me . . . as we needed. They asked us to speak at the end of the service a little bit about our work in Vinnitsa (½ the congregation is from that region). You know the Bible says we should be ready at all times to give a 'word,' well that is especially true in a Slavic church, you never know when you'll be asked to speak or preach As soon as we came in to church the Associate Pastor asked if Mark wanted to preach !

We received such a wonderful response at the Ukrainian Baptist Church and got to speak to many people after the service. . . . until we were ushered out to our next appointment ! Now remember we didn't set anything up before we came !

Misha took us back to his house where he stayed with the children and Irena took us to New Heights Church (English Speaking). Did I mention that she is a Network Queen? Have you ever been to Six Flags with kids? Do you sometimes feel like they almost drag you from here to there in their excitement? We know the feeling ! Irena was so excited to introduce us to a few of the Pastors there as well as the woman who leads the Thursday Morning Women's Bible Study she attends. Irena made sure each person we talked to was given one of our information packets that as our story 'Ukraine Bound,' a prayer/support list, a refrigerator prayer magnet and a prayer bookmark. Our heads were spinning by the time we left but we made some great connections and who knows what God will do with them in the future.

Immediately after leaving New Heights Church, we went to Irena's parents house for lunch along with a Norwegian couple, Rolph & Lev. Irena's mother, Anna, has to be one of the best Ukrainian cooks alive ! I was also excited that I could communicate with her father, Benjamin, much better this time. After just an hour, we were rushed by Benjamin & Anna to the Revival (Slavic) Church, where Irena's brother Viktor Lopitan is a Youth Leader. Irena went home and Misha came to the church.

They had hoped to have us speak at the end of the service but it went long, as there was a special singing group from Vinnitsa, Ukraine there; over 50% of the congregation is from Vinnitsa. This church borrows space from another church, so they can't go too late as there is another service just shortly after theirs. The Pastor did mention us from the pulpit and about 1/3 of the congregation turned around and looked at us (we were sitting along back wall in additional chairs that had been set out) I think we stand out sometimes.

We were flooded by people from the Vinnitsa area asking about our work, sharing about their family there, seeing if we knew anyone they knew. We were immediately invited by the Senior Pastor and Viktor to come back at 6 pm. By the time we left we had a little over 1 ½ hours to relax a little, eat dinner, discuss what we'd talk about, change and come back.

I think one of the highlights of the trip was speaking to the Youth Group. For any of you who know Mark and I you know we L O V E youth ! As the Revival Church was a little less traditional and more relaxed we returned in jeans, which definitely made me stand out . . . (a woman in pants in a Slavic Church . . . I've never seen it). But that was part of our point. We've found that our 'American-ness' is often what opens the ears and hearts.

The service started with some great contemporary worship music and then a wonderful sermonette by the Senior Pastor. He talked about filling your mind with good or bad things and used marbles (clear for good, and black for bad) in different plastic cups to emphasize his point. There were a number of parents in attendance and the Senior Youth Pastor as well.

Mark and I shared one of our favorite lessons. . . .Pizza and Liver. Mark leads off by ensuring the pizza is right under their noses so they can smell it. Then he gets a volunteer who wants to eat a piece. As they come up I pull out the plate of pizza and . . .raw slimy stinky liver. The deal is they can eat the pizza but they must eat the liver too. It usually takes a second volunteer to agree to this . . .some eager, brash young man. This time Mark rolled the piece of pizza over and tapped it on the raw liver . . . making the challenge greater. As the young man ate the pizza Mark began to give his testimony; his 18 years as a drug addict, how he came to know Christ, and how God has changed his life. Often through this though he asks the young man if the pizza is good, does he want to quit, or is he ready to eat the liver. This all draws great laughter . . . Mark is really good at cracking youth up. Mark stops the volunteer just as they have finished the pizza and are looking at the liver. He then uses the pizza and liver as an example of how drugs, or any addiction, eats all the good out of your life and leaves the stinky slimy part. It really made an impact.

Then I tell my testimony, which I start with a guessing game of what I do. They never guess, as women in Ukraine never do the work I do. At the end of my testimony I explain further how God shaped my life for the work He has called me to do with Mark. We then ended with a few minutes on what work we'll be doing in Vinnitsa, how to avoid using drugs or getting away from it if they have sampled them, and how to help a friend who may be being pulled into that addiction. We also talked about pornography addiction too. We ended our little talk with a question and answer period where the kids could ask us just about anything.

We finally left about 10:30 pm and headed back to Misha and Irena's where her parents were waiting and we ate dinner. We ate and talked till about 11:30 pm, when Mark and I hit the road. (Mark always likes to leave early to get where he's going no matter if it's

coming or leaving). We drove until about 2 am and then stopped at a Rest Stop to sleep for a few hours.

On the way home (now it's Monday), we were able to stop in Redding, CA, and eat lunch with Jon and Luann Mohr (they lived in Vinnitsa for a number of years and have been back in the states almost 2 years now). Then heading down the road, we stopped in Williams (one hour north of Sacramento) to eat dinner with Ed & Debi Jensen from our church (they lead the Mexico Mission Team & Ed is the Head Deacon). We finally made it home at 8:30 pm Monday night and fell into bed exhausted after unpacking (I had to work the next day).

Anyway, all in all it was a great trip with many divine appointments. As I type all this out I can't believe we had enough energy to do all this ! It had to of been Eternal Energy !