

Update from Ivano-Frankivsk

8 September



Dr. Gary Jerkins and Rick Montgomery from the Hillsboro Congregation along with myself arrived in Ivano-Frankivsk Ukraine late Friday evening, August 29 after flying in through Kiev. It was nice to see Kiev “back-to-normal” after the rioting and protests earlier this year which led to the expulsion of the pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovich and the election of the pro-European, Petro Poroshenko.

As you will see from the map, Ivano-Frankivsk is on the opposite side of Ukraine from the fighting which is occurring in the Lugansk, Donetsk and Mariupol areas.

Saturday morning we “hit the ground running” traveling to Tlumach to visit Roman who has rheumatoid arthritis and is confined to a wheel chair. A group from Hillsboro church of Christ has “adopted” he and his family.

Roman enjoys taking pictures and Gary Jerkins is working on putting together some of Roman's photo's into a book which should be available later this fall.



Sunday we had 35 at services which are now held in the new space the church has rented. I will send pictures later.



Monday was “First Bell” when all the schools start classes. It is not only a time to celebrate going back to school but also a time to celebrate their Ukrainian heritage. This is especially meaningful now as their sovereignty and national identity is again threatened. As you will see in my pictures, many children dress in traditional Ukrainian outfits and the girls wear flower headdress. The sentiment of the country can be seen in substituting the custom of bringing flowers to the teacher with making donations to help the men fighting in the east.

After the opening ceremonies we visited one of the relief agencies which is working with the 1600+ refugees displaced by the war. We were able to meet with the Chairman, Lesia who has put together a well-organized plan to address this urgent need. We will be working with her to identify and address needs as they arise.



Our final stop was at the city cemetery to visit the grave of Roman (another Roman), a 19 year old student from Ivano-Frankivsk who was killed earlier this year by a pro-Russian sniper during the Maidan Protests at "Independence Square" in Kiev. Roman and his family were friends of the congregation here and had helped us with the distribution of humanitarian aid.

This picture - of two young girls praying - was taken at Roman's grave.

I have also included a "shot" from downtown Ivano-Frankivsk where a target range has been set up in the town square. The target they are shooting at - a portrait of Russia's President Putin! These two pictures poignantly display the feelings of the people here.



During the week we have had the opportunity to visit hospitals, relief agencies and several outlying cities. On one trip we visited with Nina and Julia, two refugees from Donetsk now living in Staryi Lysets.

Nina is a Christian but her daughter Julia wasn't - until this week. However, because of the love and compassion of the family here, Julia was baptized by Rick Montgomery on Thursday afternoon!



Interestingly, in order to find a place to immerse her we had to rent a room at a hotel for 262 rph or \$20 just so we could use their pool however, this was a small price to pay for eternal riches!

I also started my classes at Sunrise English School. In addition to teaching six classes a week; I will also be conducting **FriendSpeak/Let's Start Talking** classes two nights a week and conducting Bible studies and classes at church.

Dr. Jerkins and Rick returned safely home on Saturday. Now I'm on my own here in I-F.

There is an increasing apprehension here with the probability that the young men 18-50 years old will be called to serve in the military.

Please keep these wonderful people in your prayers.

John