

# The Gazette

## OF MUSIC MISSION KIEV

Music/Widows/Orphans and Children/Church/Victims of War

### PICNIC ON THE DNIPRO

In war, men and women sacrifice their lives to defend and protect their families and the lives of their fellow countrymen. But perhaps the more acute form of suffering is experienced by those left behind, the widows and children of the dead. They grieve, and must find a way to continue to live, learning to cope with their tremendous loss.

Under the leadership of Oksana Polevichenko, Music Mission Kiev has developed a ministry to a group of widows of war and their children who live in Kyiv, as well as war widows scattered throughout Ukraine.

The purpose of the outreach is to assure the widows and their children that they are loved, and that their lives matter. We respect the sacrifices of their husbands, and spiritually and materially share their burden by helping them, spiritually and financially.

One of the ways we assist them is by gathering these young women and their children into a community and provide events such as the “Picnic on the Dnipro.”

In August, MMK invited one hundred people to take a cruise on the beautiful and picturesque Dnipro River in Kyiv. The widows, their children and other interested family members were invited to have lunch and experience the support of the community through singing, playing games, and having fellowship. It was a time to simply rest for a few hours from the rigors of daily life and the constant reminders of their grief.



*Laughter and joy for young military widows on MMK riverboat excursion*

As they excitedly gathered on pier 11 of Kyiv’s river terminal, some knew what to expect while many others were joining up for the first time, such as Alina, who stood apart from the others. “Come! Join us!” she was told. “You’ll have a good time.” She smiled nervously, hesitant, but with another encouraging word, Alina made her way to the boat.

As the women gathered on the top deck, they sat at the tables and began to talk. They clearly were enjoying each other’s company. All were appreciative to have a rest and experience on the cruise which they would not be able to afford on their own.

Sveta, whose husband was killed two years ago, has a twelve-year-old son. She says, “I know I can talk with these girls and they understand me. I don’t have to explain everything to them because they know what I have experienced. Here, there is such a positive attitude and a presence of hope.”

Most of the women know each other from other support groups, some of which were organized by the widows themselves. They have talked about the mundane things such as pensions, issues of bureaucracy, but



*Fun for fatherless children on MMK Dnipro River picnic*

here they can speak about themselves, emotionally and spiritually, able to enjoy each other’s company in a more personal atmosphere created by MMK.

When Ira, whose husband was killed in action almost four years ago, was asked what the difference was between the other support groups and the group sponsored by Music Mission Kiev, she answers quickly and with emphasis: “I have weeks where I am up and I have weeks when I feel depressed, but after I come to an event sponsored by MMK, I feel like I can fly for about a week. I’m made to feel special.”

As the mission volunteers serve lunch to the ladies, one can see the outpouring of their love as they visit each table. The young women are truly “honored guests” enjoying big sausage sandwiches, fresh vegetables, and bottled water or fruit drinks. Among the servers is Lieutenant-Colonel Vasily, former military commander for ten years and now an army chaplain. (He has preached several times at St. Paul’s Church.) Vasily’s presence is a comfort to the women, as he shows through serving them, his love in Christ for their needs.

After lunch, the program beings: singing songs together, games for everyone, ending with a devotional talk by Vasily.

*MMK is honoured to honour and support family members of the fallen. This is Viktoria. She was married to Nakiitta, who gave his life defending his country, Ukraine. Viktoria was devastated at the loss of her husband, but chose to live on, in positive ways. She adopted this her new son, Nakiitta, pictured onboard here with MMK President, Wes Janzen.*



At the conclusion of Vasily’s message, a familiar song begins to play. One of the volunteers demonstrates some simple choreography and asks the ladies to come and join her in the movements. Six or seven women come forward, including the reluctant Alina, who now feels fully accepted by the group. The music begins slowly then accelerates, and the ladies dance, their hands raised over their heads, free

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# The Bible Marathon

Less than six hundred feet from KGB headquarters, (now renamed “The Security Service of Ukraine”), where numerous priests and pastors were once brought in for interrogation during the days of Soviet communism, leaders from the Ukrainian Christian community, including Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical believers, gathered in St. Sophia Square to conduct a four-day Bible reading marathon.

Beginning on a Thursday, and ending late Sunday night, citizens of Ukraine, from all walks of life, took turns in reading the Bible. Beginning in Genesis and ending with the Book of Revelation, their intent was to be witnesses to their society of the importance of God’s Word.

One after another, each read a few chapters. They did this non-stop, day and night, attracting thousands of passerby’s, in addition to almost 500,000 people who watched through live streaming on the internet.

Wes Janzen and Sergey Basarab were among the readers for this event.



*Dr. Kommandant, President, Ukrainian Bible Society*

“Our reasons for this Bible reading marathon were two-fold,” explained Gregory Komendant, one of Ukraine’s most prominent Baptist leaders and President of Ukraine’s Bible Society. “The first reason was that we wanted to be a public “witness” of the Word of God within our society. Secondly, we wanted to show Ukrainian society that we, as Christian believers of many confessions, are united in the cause of presenting God’s Word and its “Good News” to our fellow countrymen.”

On the final night of this celebration, following the reading of the last chapter of Revelation, the Kyiv Symphony Orchestra and Chorus gave a concert in the open air, presenting Slavic classics, African-American spirituals, and renowned selections by Brahms and Handel.



*Dr. Wes Janzen, MMK President, at St. Sophia’s national Bible reading marathon*

Between songs, Wes spoke to the crowd about the music and its message.

“When asked if we wanted to participate with cherished ministry partners at the Bible Society, we immediately accepted,” said Wes Janzen, President of Music Mission of Kyiv and Conductor of Kyiv Symphony Orchestra and Chorus. “In Ukraine, there is such a warmth and receptivity to God’s Word.”

As the KSOC began Handel’s “Hallejuah” chorus, the audience rose to their feet, at a location less than two miles from the Dnipro River where Volodymyr the Great accepted Christianity 1030 years ago.

“When we stage our concerts, or when we distribute food packages or other humanitarian aid,” said Wes, “we can always count on the Bible Society for their help. When they invited us to sing at the marathon, we accepted with alacrity, knowing that this was an extension of our own mission to be ‘witnesses in the world.’”

Thus, MMK continues to spread the Gospel through music and message to the country of Ukraine, as God brings new opportunities in this ever-changing country.



*Serhiy Basrab reading scripture at Ukrainian Bible Society national Bible reading marathon*



*KSOC singers share scripture in song at conclusion of marathon Bible reading*

# A Safe Place

When Ira (Irena), one of our MMK pastors to children and orphans, welcomed over seventy-five kids from the war zone to the Mission's summer camp, she insisted that they call her by her first name. But when asked what they really call her, she answers, "Well, they all call me, 'Mum'."

And that seems appropriate because the camp, located just outside Kyiv, and approximately 400 miles from the war zone, feels like a gathering of a large extended family on a vacation.

On the grounds of the camp, ironically named "Zmina" or "Change," there is much laughing and joy as children are having fun. The camps days are full of various activities and games, but perhaps most important, the Mission has established a setting where wonderful life-changing experiences have been created and experienced, and the kids say these spiritually intimate moments will never be forgotten.



Orphan children from war zone arrive Kyiv train station on route to wonderful MMK summer orphan Bible camps



Our wonderful MMK pastors to orphans and children: Oxanna and Irena

"We know most of the kids here because we work with them throughout the year in the war zone," Ira continues to explain. "We know their lives and most of their stories. And we know that by providing them such a peaceful place as this camp, they will have an opportunity to feel and experience love, to know that someone cares for them, to experience what it means to be part of a family. Here they'll know quiet and peace. They will have an opportunity to heal."

Most campers are teenagers and have travelled from the war affected towns of Kromatorsk, Drushivka and Turetz, places that have experienced bombing, constant artillery shelling, street fighting and occupation. Many are orphans; others from broken homes. Some have been abandoned, while others come from loving Christian homes. Nonetheless, all are children of war. All have suffered some tragic loss, experienced psychological trauma, and have felt the effects of the deprivations of war.

Some of these children were as young as eight or ten when the war started. They cannot forget the terrible things they have seen. The images return to their mind's eye.



MMK summer orphan Bible camp 2018: volleyball

The camp is a place where they can leave the sounds and sights of war, and escape that stress for a short period of time.

"We are providing the kids an opportunity to not only expand their biblical knowledge and spiritual experiences, but also provide a guaranteed safe place," says Ira.

The program is full of activity: game playing, arts and crafts, sports. Large parts of the day are dedicated to Bible study and group discussions under the pine trees that seem to reach towards the heavens.

Here, in the imposed quiet of the forest, with a slight breeze that staves off the increasing heat of a late morning sun, the kids gather in their group circles to read scripture, pray and then share their stories. They confess their fears, explain their losses, seek understanding of the traumas forced upon their young lives and about which they had no power to prevent.

Observing from a short distance away, one does not dare interrupt the intimacy of shared revelation of their hearts. No one seems to move, as if moving would be a form of disrespect. Everyone is engrossed in each other's stories, patiently listening, quietly understanding what the other is saying, reliving their own experiences in their own minds and hearts. There are many tears.



Daily small group Bible lessons at MMK orphan bible camp

Music Mission Kiev has these Bible camps because we care about these children. "We have created a family for those who haven't experienced what it means to be in a family," Ira explains.

Lera from Kramatorsk, aged fourteen, already thinks and speaks like an adult. At age ten, she was sitting in her classroom when an artillery shell exploded nearby. She saw two of her classmates killed. "I remember, you know, I'll never forget. I still see them. I'm waiting for the day that I can enlist," she says in a determined voice.

She walks away slowly, as if she is carrying a burden on her shoulders, and rejoins the circle of her new family.

We have created a safe place for these children, and as they experience our love for them, may they come to know that He is their "safe place," wherever they are and whatever their future holds.



MMK summer orphan Bible camp 2018: swimming

# The McMurrins Are Back in Ukraine

Roger and Diane McMurrin returned to Kiev in August to assist Wes and Kim with the ministry. After three weeks of preparing the property in Gorenichi for guests the congregation of St. Paul's came for worship in their beautiful garden. We will enjoy several Sunday mornings in the "Green Cathedral" before the weather turns cooler.



Gorenichi worship

Diane is teaching a series on the Gospel of Mark on Saturday mornings at the Bieli Dome to the widows and pensioners. Roger, though his back pain has not improved, has the men's group at his house weekly, where he can teach the Bible from his easy chair.

A new members class for the church will begin soon. Diane will conduct interviews with each candidate to share the Gospel and the Good News of salvation one-to-one. A prayer group and church leadership meeting will begin in September. Roger and Diane plan to return to the States in October.

The McMurrins have purchased a condo in Lebanon, Ohio, where they plan to live six months a year, as they ease into retirement. After 25 years in Ukraine, they are happy to know that Wes and Kim Janzen are the capable leaders the mission needs to continue.



Roger with men



Diane teaching

## KSOC on Tour in America September 5 — October 16

Please refer to the website: <https://www.musicmissionkiev.org/tour> for the latest tour schedule. Don't miss this excellent group of musicians who will bring a concert of excellence and inspiration.



*Continued from page 1* and unbound, as the others smile and clap their hands in celebration. Joy is everywhere!

As the cruise comes to an end, Lt. Colonel Vasily says in a strong, father-like voice, "Girls, don't forget to come to the car, we have a gift for you."

As they depart, each of the women with their children receives a gift package containing food and other household items. Alina, who, hours

ago, had hesitated to board the boat, is smiling, as she receives her packet. "Well, are you glad you came?" she is asked. "Yes," she answers, her smile growing larger as she remembers the last few hours. "I had so much fun."

Pray for the widows of Ukraine, especially those who have been widowed by this dreadful war. Through your help with MMK, they are not forgotten.

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR PRAYERS AND SUPPORT!

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