St. James Alumni Project update: Feb/March 2019

To this day I am astounded at the grace and favor God has granted to the Ukraine. I have continued to meet with St. James Alumni and visit the local congregations where they are ministering. This season I was fortunate to be able to take advantage of the early spring weather and make a couple of visits outside of Kiev. I am looking with great anticipation and expectation as to what God will do in Ukraine.



A young soldier's funeral in Lviv

Despite the drawn out war in the East that has displaced millions, long forgotten by people around the world, Churches are moving forward with outreach to new areas. Churches continue to train leaders and young people and St. James Alumni are a vital part of this.



As Rev. Walter Zygarevich wrote,"Christianity in Ukraine is believed to date back to the apostolic period. Ukrainians believe that the Apostle Andrew came preaching the Gospel in the Southern parts of the country. That he made his way up the Dnieper River, reaching Kiev in 55 AD, where he prophesied that a great Christian City would be established there. In the year 988 Prince Vladimir the Great established Christianity as the official religion in Ukraine by baptizing the people in the Dnieper.



Whether St. Andrew actuality came to Ukraine we cannot confirm, but one thing we can say is that there has been revival in this land dating back to the early parts of the past century . And many missionaries have gone out of Ukraine to other nations. Pastors who were exiled to Siberia in the Soviet era spread



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the Good News there and many gave their lives. Most protestant pastors in Russia come from Ukraine . There are now missionaries from Ukraine and other former Soviet nations, including children of immigrants to the US, spreading the Gospel in Latin America, Africa, India and other parts of the world.

God is getting ready to move again in Ukraine . The prophetic utterances that revival is coming, I believe, will now begin to be fulfilled - no more delay in fulfillment of God's word! The time is NOW ! This revival is to spread to Russia and beyond. We are getting ready for this and the much needed revival in North America .



This February I had the opportunity to visit western Ukraine and meet with a St. James alumni who has spent the last 20 years in prison. I traveled with Pastor Sergei Muchak *(class of ’93)* on an adventure to visit with Yaroslav Mysiak one of his classmates at St.James. I got in touch with him via facebook and in our correspondence asked if it was possible to visit. Ukrainian jails have been notorious for rough and inhumane treatment in Soviet times so I was very surprised that the reply was an astounding, “YES”. I hesitated because I did not know what to expect and how



an American would be allowed into a Ukrainian jail to to meet an inmate? Just as prayed about this I received a long awaited deposit into my bank account and knew that this was an answer to go ahead with the plans. The next day I sat down and planned out our visit. Pastor Sergei and I traveled by train to the city of Lviv and then from there over the Carpathian mountains to the city of Uzhgorod. This city lies on the western border of Ukraine near Hungary.



We were met by Yaroslav's mother Magda at the train station and walked with her to her apartment a few blocks away. It was a joyous meeting and we talked for hours. Magda told us of the ordeal their family experienced and through all, her faith in the Lord has grown tremendously. She is one of the brightest and strongest Christians I've every met. Happy, frank and devoted. Despite the fact that Yaroslav remains in prison she is hopeful as is his wife that he will one day be vindicated. Yaroslav was one of the youngest students at the college in Korosten and the only student from this part of Ukraine. He graduated from St. James and was on fire to do the Lord's will. At his church he became youth leader and was eager to be a pastor. A tragedy took place one night that changed his life and his families life forever. Yaroslav's uncle got involved in bringing contraband across the border from Europe into the Ukraine. They had made some deal with the customs guards at the borders and the deal went sour. There was a lot of money lost and the lawlessness of the early 90s was rampant. One evening Yaroslav's grandfather, grandmother and uncle were slaughtered in their home. During the investigation many facts were changed and others ignored. That night Yaroslav was at his apartment because of a fever and his wife and



parents were at church. Due to the fact that Yaroslav was home alone he was made the scapegoat and all charges were put on him. He was threatened that his wife and 2 year old child would suffer greatly if he fought the charges. After all the the court procedures he was convicted of a triple murder and was sentenced to death. Yaroslav's parents never gave up on him and never accepted that their son would spend his life in jail on false evidence. His father visited as often and possible and his mother lead the church in praying for Yaroslav and justice. Yaroslav's love for the God's word kept him going as he anticipated the day he would be executed for these unfounded crimes. Yaroslav began a prayer group and bible study in the prisons he was in. He was moved about the country from one jail to another as lawyers tried to prove his innocence. Each time he was moved the entire appeal process had to begin again form the beginning. The time drew near for his execution day. I am sure it was the prayers of his parents and church that brought about a change in the prison system of Ukraine. Just days before his execution the death penalty was abolished in Ukraine. Yaroslav was spared an undeserving execution. Since that time there have been many appeals and court hearings on his case but the corruption of the system continues and Yaroslav remains in prison. He says that he is there for the other men he serves. He has baptized over 60 prisoners and many more have come to Christ because of his faithfulness. He is a very resourceful man and very respected in the prison system. When we arrived at the old rundown prison in the center of Uzhgorod we were allowed to meet one on one with Yaroslav. His countenance was shining and we hugged, talked and prayed together. I love this brother in the Lord. The day we left he was scheduled to see the judge and was very hopeful that he would allow a review of his case. Unfortunately, the judge refused him once again and the date was moved forward to April. This did not phase his family as they have gone through this many, many times before. One sure blessing is that Yaroslav is in his hometown and his family may visit often. They provide all the food for him and his cell mates as the prison food is often tainted and very unhealthy. One of the miracles that Magda shared was that one day Yaroslav and



his two cellmates were poisoned very seriously. All three ended up in the infirmary and his cellmates died. Yaroslav was survived and recovered with little harm. The doctors could not explain why he had the same level of poison in his blood but survived. He continues to serve as the prison pastor but is hopeful that one day he will return to his family as a free man.



One other highlight was a visit with Father Sergei Zhyravlev. He taught at St. James and is actively involved in the reformation of the Russian Orthodox Church and leads many groups in the Reformed Orthodox Church. He may be exiled from Russia at any time but continues this work in Ukraine. I met with him as he was teaching at the Youth with a Mission school outside of Kiev.



In the next week I will visit Nikolai and Tatiana Moshkovskiy at the private christian school run by his church in the city Vyzhgorod, a suburb of Kiev. They have run a charter school for several years and now are making plans on building their own building for the school. I cant wait to visit the school and see the plans they have for the future.



I look forward to going to the city of Kharov. There are many churches there and this is one of cities near the Russian border. It has not been occupied by Russian forces but the threat is real.



Thank you for your continued prayers and support of this mission. It has been so valuable to the alumni of St. James and greatly encouraged them.