



The Rue Family

UKRAINE

August - October 2023

Dear Praying Friends and Family,

This overdue prayer letter is longer than usual because it not only covers three months' time, but it highlights my recent trip into the war-torn regions of Ukraine. I hope it is a blessing to you and will give you some insight into what is going on in Ukraine, as well as our plans for the ministry God has called us to finish.

The months of August and September were spent updating our supporting churches and attending a couple weeklong missions conferences. We traveled to Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and California. The Lord blessed and manifested Himself in these meetings...enough said!

For over a year we have prayed about taking a trip into Ukraine. Many details had to come together to make it possible: scheduling around my meetings with our supporting churches; waiting for the Lord's timing; our men in Ukraine needed time to prepare; and I invited Brother Kline to accompany me, whose schedule also had to be taken into consideration. The Lord wonderfully brought everything together during the second half of October.

This trip was important and necessary for several reasons. First, I wanted to assess the situation in our region personally and seek the Lord's will about returning to Ukraine with my family. Secondly, our men wanted me to encourage the saints and see, firsthand, how they have been ministering to those affected by the war. They wanted to organize a local outreach in addition to a trip into the regions once occupied by the Russian armies. Thirdly, our ministry has not only survived the war but is thriving, and I needed to ordain my right-hand man, Alexei Kalinin, and put him into the pastorate. I asked Brother Kline to participate in the ordination because he helped teach Brother Kalinin in our Bible Institute. Fourthly, I needed to give Brother Kalinin full power of attorney over my house so that he could take care of my legal issues in my absence and put it into his or the church's name if Russia ever got control of the region. One of the first things to take place when Russia annexes a region to itself is confiscation of property. An American citizen's property would be at the top of the list in such a situation. Lastly, all our homeschool curriculum is in Ukraine, and it would cost well over a thousand dollars to replace it, so bringing back the materials would help finance the trip.



Ordination of Pastor Kalinin

The quickest and easiest route was through Moldova. Missionary Paul Hamilton graciously agreed to meet me at the airport and drive me to the border of Ukraine. We had a great time of fellowship, and the hospitality he showed us was first class! He confirmed for me one important issue affecting our region. Russia's 14th army is currently located in Transnistria with much equipment, which is only twenty miles from my house.

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I left the USA on a Monday, and it took three days to arrive at my home in Ukraine. As we approached the Ukrainian border, we passed one of the tent cities erected to house those fleeing the war. It is still there waiting. Once across the border the effects of the war were immediately seen. Many residential homes were abandoned, and property was neglected. I arrived just a couple of hours before Wednesday night's prayer meeting and the church wanted me to preach. That night I first heard for myself the sirens that sound when Russia launches an attack from the air on our region.

The next two days were spent ministering locally to those affected by the war. We preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ to around 100 people they respectfully listened, but no one responded to the invitation. People gladly took literature and were thankful for the help. One woman suffering hardship because of the war burst into tears to receive diapers for her 24-year-old, handicapped son.

On Friday afternoon we traveled to Odessa to have my passport translated and notarized and have a power-of-attorney made for Brother Kalinin. We had a great time of fellowship. He told me God's working in his life and how the Lord was leading and teaching him as he led the church during these hard times. We saw the signs of war: bombed buildings, barbed wire, barricades, military checkpoints, etc... Odessa has been hit by many drones every night, and I wanted to get out of there before nightfall, but we were delayed. The air raid sirens began to sound, which was a little unnerving, but the people themselves paid no attention, going about their business as if all was normal. What a great picture of God's sirens sounding from His word and the world behaves as if judgment is not coming.



A public school destroyed by the war

The following two days were spent with our church in revival meetings. The preaching, singing, special music, testimonies, and dinner on the church grounds together made the trip worthwhile. The ordination service Sunday evening was, in fact, the culmination of years of prayer and preparation in the ministry. What a blessing it is to know that the church, which began as a prayer request, is now thriving on its own in Ukraine. May the Lord help us do it again!

Preparations had to be made before taking the five-hour trip into eastern Ukraine. A test arose when our van began acting up and we could not resolve the problem. It was having difficulty starting and it would stall out on hills. The last thing I wanted to do was load it to the max and take it into a war zone. After some prayer and consideration, I rested on the thought that God's people were praying for us. So, we left as soon as curfew ended at 5:00 am Tuesday morning. The van acted up a bit then the issue seemed to resolve itself! Thank God!

We had another guest help us on this trip: Brother Oleksandr Ilchenko from Zhitomir, who wanted to participate. Our church in Ukraine has supported him for many years and has financed several of his multi-city evangelistic outreaches. During these outreaches he made contact with many groups of Christians all across Ukraine which later helped us to know where help was needed the most. He met us in Rozdilna and made most of the preparations for our trip ahead of time. We had 800 care packages of food (12 lbs. each); 600 loaves of bread which were baked in wood stoves by two churches in the region; over 1,000 packages of rice; and lots of literature all to be handed out in five towns in two days.

The first town on our route was a village where about 40 or 50 people were gathered waiting for us. After introductions we preached the Gospel and gave an invitation. The people here were very different from those in the Odessa region. They had endured an occupation of the Russian army and wanted to hear what we had to say. Ten people came out of the crowd upon the invitation to receive Christ as Savior! It has been a long time since I saw this kind of response. It reminded me of the 1990's after the collapse of the Soviet Union.



Brother Ilchenko distributing literature

I've not seen it like this since. It creates a bit of a quandary. I've gotten used to dealing with people, one on one, and even refusing to lead people in a prayer if I was not satisfied that they truly understood the Gospel. But in dealing with crowds, I've always kept D. L. Moody and the Chicago fire in mind. Who knows what is going to happen in these regions in a month? This could literally be their last opportunity to hear and respond to an invitation to receive Christ. I preached Christ and the Gospel as clearly as I knew how. The rest we trust to God. The literature and care packages were gladly received.



There was a larger group waiting at the second town. After preaching the Gospel we gave the invitation and thirty people separated from the crowd to be saved! I was in a state of disbelief and went over things with them again making sure they understood the purpose of the invitation. They insisted they understood and were sincere in their desire to receive Jesus Christ as Savior. We unloaded all our supplies in this town and had to return to our storage garage and load up again.



We made a quick visit to one of the families in a town called Partyzans'ke who were saved when Alexei and Oleksander visited back in May. His name was Oleg. He was a wealthy man before the war, but his house was completely destroyed by a Russian missile. His backyard workshop was now their new home. One night while sleeping, Oleg and his wife were awakened by a rocket that

came right through their roof into their sleeping quarters about three feet from their heads. It did not explode! God takes care of His own! While we were there another rocket hit just a field or so away. This was normal for them. No one panicked.

The next stop was called Blahodatne, which means "Grace." It is as if the spirit that was in those Russian soldiers (see Eph. 2) had such hatred for the word itself that they destroyed this town. They dropped bombs on all the houses reducing them to rubble, yet there were people still trying to live there. They were gathering their bricks and trying to erect small structures to live in before winter hit. We preached the Gospel, gave an invitation for salvation, led seven people to Christ, and handed out the aid and literature. One woman said, "Thank you for the food and literature, but I wanted to ask if your organization has the ability to help us with lumber so we can put a roof over our heads before winter?" I felt very small and was reminded of the Apostle Peter's words, "...Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee..." I told her that she was God's child now and has prayer. Somehow God would take care of them and that I would ask the churches in America to pray for them as well.

We had one more meeting that night. I do not know how many people were saved. There was no room in the building for an invitation and we had to lead them to Christ where they sat. We made it to our lodging barely before the midnight curfew an hour north of Kherson, which was shelled 60+ times that night.



The following morning, we loaded up the van and drove right up to the border of Kherson, only a few miles from the front. There was a large crowd waiting. It took two trips to get all the aid and literature to the location. Brother Oleksander and I both preached to the crowd, while Alexei and Casey went for supplies. At one point, while preaching, we heard an explosion of a rocket. The people casually turned their eyes in the general direction and then returned to listening to the preaching. Then you could hear the Ukrainian army's response of multiple rockets being fired. Again, I do not know how many people received Christ during the invitation.

Suffice it to say that the Lord allowed me to preach the Gospel and lead more people to Christ in two days than I have in the last two years. Please pray for us that we can continue to work with these people.

The trip provided insights and spiritual lessons into the tactics of the enemy (1 Pet. 5:8). The first involved the minefields. As we drove, we passed many fields, some with warning signs and others without, where the Russians buried thousands of mines. There are many mission fields that the enemy has occupied for centuries.



Pioneer missionaries need to prepare the field by removing the mines before it can have a harvest. The second thing I noticed was in the town of Snihurivka, which was occupied by the Russians for several months. Every gate was marked after they systematically went from house to house. They spray painted a big “0” if they posed no threat to Russia.

They painted a “+” which meant it was a positive threat and that someone was probably killed there. What if our adversary the devil went through your neighborhood? Would you be a positive threat to his kingdom and plans? The last was in a town called Novopetrivka

where we met Serhei. He and his wife didn’t listen to the warnings and stayed in their house while everyone else in their village fled from the advancing Russians. They were caught between the two armies. He showed us one rocket casing that exploded about 20 feet from the mouth of his cellar. He and his wife thought that all would be okay. After all, they didn’t mean anyone any harm. However, he realized who his real enemy



was when his wife went outside and tried to make a phone call. A Russian sniper grazed her head with a bullet. As Christians called to “endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” we cannot be neutral in this war! Those that compromised the most with the enemy in Ukraine fell first and suffered the worst. He showed us many little metal arrows, called flechettes, that the Russians use in their cluster bombs. They were small but very deadly. It only takes one to kill you. I was reminded of the “fiery darts of the wicked” and how important it is for us to put on the whole armor of God.

It is difficult to quantify the blessings of this trip. The souls saved, the aid people received, the literature distributed, the ordination of one of God’s choicest saints in Ukraine, the saints encouraged, each individually, would have justified the expense that went into this trip. However, personally, for me it was that my head and my heart are united again. I have a renewed burden. We plan to return to Ukraine after the hard winter is over. It is only a matter of where and when. I am praying that we can just return to our home and continue the ministry as planned, but we may have to find a safer location with a better exit route for a time. Please pray for the Lord’s guidance as I make another trip in March.



Thank you for all you do for the Lord in helping us do His work in Ukraine. May the Lord richly bless you in every way.

That Ukraine May Know Him,

Christopher Rue

Philippians 3:10