

## Poltava Bible School May 2009

POLTAVA Bible School convinced me that the spirit of God is alive and well in Ukraine, despite the many setbacks endured by the enthusiastic people of this huge nation caught between Russia and Europe, writes Bro Charles Abel of Horley Ecclesia in Surrey, England.

Almost 50 brothers and sisters had travelled from all parts of across Ukraine to attend, some spending over 12 hours on trains and buses to reach their destination, the Almaz [Aluminium] Hotel in the outskirts of Poltava, a city of over 300,000 people , the site of Russia's historic defeat of the Swedish army 300 years ago and regional centre for aluminium mining. My 3 hour flight from London to Kiev and 5 hours on a coach to Poltava 300km east of Kiev seemed easy by comparison. Sadly, I was unable to arrive in time for the Friday evening talk, given by Sis Ludmila, the founder of the Poltava ecclesia and main driving force behind much of the work to spread the Truth in Ukraine. However, her in-depth study of the beasts in Daniel's prophecy had clearly captured the enthusiasm of the visitors.

Despite the language barrier I had fun trying to communicate with bro and sis and interested visitors. Sis Marina, from Kharkhov, had brought her 9 year-old daughter Anastasia. Sis Tamara from Lugansk told me she was a human ecologist, although I'm not quite sure what that means! Sis Anna had travelled up from Kherson with her daughters Tanya (21) and Nadia (14), with Tanya's boyfriend Valeriy. Valeriy had never been out of his home town before. I had a particularly touching chat with Sis Nadia from southern Ukraine. Through translation, she recollected how she had given birth to a daughter in the Soviet era and been told the little girl would not live – officials had even given her paperwork to that effect. Someone suggested she get the girl baptised, by an orthodox priest operating covertly, to safeguard her salvation. As Sis Nadia recalled, she did not imagine that baptism saved the baby, but she decided God could save, and this inspired Nadia to start searching for true salvation. When the Gospel message arrived in south Ukraine she welcomed it joyously as the truth she had been seeking. Angelika, her daughter, now lives in St Petersburg, with her husband and daughter, all baptised into Jesus.



Saturday started with the daily Bible readings, all conducted in Russian, and followed by some healthy debate. Ukrainian bro and sis love clearly enjoy discussing the Word. There is no holding back in sharing their knowledge and seeking new insights. Their enthusiasm was infectious – even across the language barrier. A very inspiring start to the day! My talks followed, including “Shine like Stars”, “Speaking with Grace” and “Kingdom Visions”. Each was translated by Bro Igor from Kiev, a proof-reader and subtitler translator by profession. He did a great job , who provided the most meticulous service possible – many thanks. Further help to help get my messages across I used a came from series of PowerPoint presentations, which had been expertly translated by Sis Lena Podgayskaya in Moscow – thank you Lena, they made all the difference! Projecting key messages and references, in Cyrillic script, really helps to keep the audience involved.



Indeed, I was surprised and really delighted by how attentive the audience was – it can't be easy listening to a visiting speaker who is burbling on in his own language. But these bro and sis gave huge feedback, nodding enthusiastically, looking quizzical, hanging on each phrase. These are enthusiastic Bible students, eager to improve their insight.

Lunch, like all the meals, was taken in the hotel, providing a great opportunity for bro and sis from different parts of Ukraine to catch up on news – this was clearly clearly a church family who were delighted to be together again. Much fun was had pinpointing home towns on a huge map of Ukraine, an activity that really fostered connectedness and stimulated discussion. Duncan also distributed spectacles and a blood pressure monitor- many have little funds left over each month for medical needs.



In the afternoon we had the joyous baptism of Vera, a lady from southern Ukraine, who had met other brothers and sisters in the area. Since the hotel had no suitable facilities the baptism took place a short walk away in the bath of the flat of sister Veronika's flat. Sis Vera's excitement and relief as she emerged from the baptism waters was wonderful to witness. Back at the hotel the day continued with more talks, Bro Duncan Heaster of Riga Ecclesia in Latvia, discussing Peter's denial and a Russian video about the Holy Land playing after dinner. Only at 10:15 did the last bro and sis finally drift away to their rooms.

Sunday started with the daily readings again and , with more healthy debate, plus accompanied by an illustrated talk on Rahab's role in the fall of Jericho from Bro Duncan. At the breaking of bread I exhorted on the theme of dependency, how we are completely dependent upon God's grace and mercy. The emblems were shared with reverence and meditative reflection. After lunch everyone started heading for home, but there was more excitement in store. Nikolay, husband of Sis Nadia, had asked to be baptised, following years of study, prompting a return to Sis Veronika's flat for another joyous commitment to a life in Christ.



As we travelled back to Kiev by coach, across a vast landscape of deep fertile soils, long open stretches of empty highway, lurching between patches of repaired road surface and subsidence, bumping through potholes, ploughing remorselessly through quiet little villages, with cows tethered by the roadside, Poltava memories flooded back. We visited Bro and Sis in their homes. Life is not easy living on a pension of 650Hrivna a month (pound;65). Many employees get little more. No wonder they find life hard. Despite this the Ukrainian Bro and Sis are eager to share their faith. There are no ecclesial halls, but they remain positive all the same, bringing friends and interested contacts to the truth. With a population of over 46 million the potential to share God's word is colossal. In all we packed a lot in and I'm glad we did. Many of these bro and sis return to lives isolated from fellowship, eagerly awaiting the next gathering. They are not alone. Bro and sis all around the world depend on such meetings for fellowship and mutual encouragement. If you get the chance to attend one, do so. I certainly gained much more from my time in Poltava than I gave. Praise God for making such events possible.

*Charles Abel, Horley Ecclesia UK, May 2009*

**NOTE: We are always looking for speakers and assistants at these gatherings [as well as sponsors]- please let us know if you'd like to get involved at [info@carelinks.net](mailto:info@carelinks.net) ; and thanks so much to those who enabled this gathering financially.**