

Update 13 - written December 1, 2016

Coming up:

December 11: I will be sharing at Christ Community Lutheran Church at 10 am.

690 S. 10th Street Lebanon

December 12: I will be flying out of Portland, OR at 12:30pm.

December 13: If all goes as scheduled, I will arrive in Kiev, Ukraine at 8:30pm.

*My mailing address
the ministry:*

(cut out and tape on the envelope)
to: CMF International

write: June Johnson

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My extended time home has been a huge blessing and I am deeply grateful to God for it. It has given me a chance to help mom, begin healing myself as well as study for my two wound and ostomy certification exams.

I was pleased with my test grades and it feels good to be updated on the information related to my nursing specialty. Stunned shock and raw grief of Dad's passing are

gone now. In their place are good memories, a steady 'I miss you' and a far deeper understanding of what others (who have had to say good bye sooner than they expected) have gone through. Being here with Mom these past 3 months has been a privilege and we are both glad it didn't have to be any other way.

Besides the churning of emotions, detailed 'paper work' that comes with death and the usual activities of daily life, we have also worked to prepare the farm to put up for sale in the spring. God gave us 44 wonderful years here and we love this place. But, Mom is looking forward to living closer to my brother and his wife in Gearhart (Seaside), Oregon.

I chose to leave before Christmas on purpose because it allows me to get back in time to settle in, take part in the Christmas outreaches and be ready to be fully involved with winter ministry. My next furlough will be in about 2 1/2 - 3 years.

This update is actually 2 in 1. I had spent the better part of the day writing the update below. Then about ten minutes after I had finished, I received an email from Mom saying ' Call me as soon as you can.' I spent the rest of the night preparing to return to Oregon. So in one way it is odd to send out August's update in November. Yet, in another way, it explains so well why I am going back.

Update 12, written August 29, 2016

Intense Back in April, I saw these 7 weeks coming and worked hard to do what I could to prepare for them. On one hand I have no regrets; I threw my whole self into this summer and 'left it all on the field.' On the other hand, when I crossed the 'finish line' on Aug. 20th I was numb and somewhere beyond exhaustion. This past week I allowed myself to come to a screeching halt. Probably sounds weird but even though I was tired, I had this 'I have to!' desire to paint. So now the front gate and two doors on the garage are looking sharp with a fresh coat of dark cherry. Somehow a brush in my hand, helped me begin to sort through the zillion thoughts & feelings in my heart.

Family Camp For your prayers, I am extremely grateful! You held us in prayer for -

* health & safety - There were the typical cold/flu, allergies, a sprained wrist and scraped knees; 2 kids needed antibiotics...but I was blessed to have a retired Russian military Christian Family Doctor at my side. So, because of the minor nature of things, neither of us spent a lot of time in the First Aid building.

Our one concerning case was a 12 year old girl with severe cerebral palsy who did not recover from a seizure in the usual way. After about 40 min., her parents took her to the hospital and it was found that she had an infection. What kind of infection, I never found out but they admitted her for IV antibiotics and she was back home by the end of the week. While it was a huge disappointment that this family had to

leave (it was the first outing they had taken as a family in 5 years), we later heard that the Lord used even their short time at camp to work in the dad's heart (he has been angry with God since the birth of his daughter) and for that we thank God!

* wisdom, obedience and servant/leadership for everyone who is helping - Pastor Boris (head pastor) told the congregation this past Sunday that this summer had been a record year at Grace Baptist - 7 camps had happened! 2 in July – outreaches to moms and their special needs kids; 1 camp for pre-teens, 1 hiking camp for teenagers, 1 children's camp (VBS) for 30 kids in a neighboring village, 1 children's camp (VBS) for 44 kids here at Grace and, a first ever in the history of the church, family camp. Besides all of these camps, English Club ministry also did a 2 week Evangelistic Outreach - with 120 people participating daily! As you might guess, those in leadership roles were involved in 3 or more of these events. My concern about their fatigue was one reason that I asked for your prayers.

Yes, I had the honor of playing a large role in the Family Camp. BUT, I was not alone. First, I knew that this was of God so I had His 100% support. Through you, God provided the needed finances for this outreach. And, God brought alongside a strong team of 16 people. As you know it is one thing to ask someone to help because of his or her talents, however, to go above and beyond what has been asked - is their choice alone. Tanya K. (camp co-director & leader of the special needs ministry) and I were thrilled and humbled as we saw how all week long the leadership team and the participants themselves went above and beyond to love and serve others.

* that God would continue to prepare each person's heart and have His way in each person's life before, during and after Family Camp – the answer to this prayer will only fully be known in heaven but there are already things we saw/see that make our hearts sing!

Friendships were made -

In my last update I shared that half who came to family camp (about 50) were members of the church and half (about 40 people) were families with special needs children. Tanya K. and I wanted the two groups to get to know each other...to become unafraid of each other.

After church on Sunday, I dropped into the chair next to Tanya K. She smiled a weary but genuine smile, leaned over and softly said, "I saw this morning how Dennis greeted Vitalick – saying 'Hey brother!' It was so neat to watch." Dennis has a special needs son and attends church regularly with his family. Vitalick has a special needs daughter and, before camp, I had only seen him twice. Before camp, they didn't know each other – now they are friends.

During camp, my respect for him went still higher as I watched Pastor Roma take on the care of the hardest kid. While Roma is a father of 6, I know this autistic teenage boy was out of his comfort zone. Still he walked and prayed for him for hours allowing his mother to rest and participate in camp. That deeply impressed me.

“When you mend the broken, feed the hungry, take in the outcast, raise your voice for those who have no voice, and stand up for those who are powerless, that is the life saving, life changing work of an everyday hero.”

Matthew Johnson (my brother)

At the Vacation Bible School held at the church the week after the Family Camp, 3 special needs families brought their children. Yes, it was a stretch for the leaders to incorporate them...but they wanted to do it and did it with grace. The kids were no longer a ‘diagnosis’ – they were children. The wall of fear is crumbling!

Spiritual Fruit –

At the July camps, 3 moms of special needs kids invited God to be Lord of their lives.

At the Family Camp, 1 mom of a special needs child invited God to be Lord of her life.

Tanya N. (the retired doctor that helped me at Family camp) came up to me twice and said, “This camp changed me! I am going to stop nagging my husband into the Kingdom! Instead, I am going to love him and pray for him.”

Era – (a church member that came to Family Camp with her husband & daughter) was excitedly talking with a group of gals I know following church two Sundays ago. I stepped over to listen in. After a few minutes I protested that I couldn’t understand a thing but I wanted to know why they were all smiling and nodding. Era grinned - switched from Ukrainian to Russian – and shared, “The desire is so great I can’t sleep! Did you see all the dads at Family Camp? The men felt included at Family Camp! We have to keep that going. We have to start a Family Outreach. It’s all I can think about!!”

20 minutes later, we had decided on the first step towards that – a picnic. The plan is huge (but that happens when God is in your heart) – we are inviting the whole church, plus any friends they want to invite, plus the 40 special needs families that were at the July camps, plus the special needs families that were at the Family Camp. That could all add up to a picnic for 150 people. The picnic will provide a platform for fellowship that is family friendly, doable for our special needs families and non-threatening for those who are new. So, what am I trying to say? That God has placed the ache of His heart - that whole families would call Him Lord – in an

ordinary woman who has zero ministry experience. And she – with fear, trembling *AND* great joy – is saying, “Here I am Lord, send me!”

And - For me Family Camp was an amazing experience in how it went from a desire God laid on my heart to an overwhelmingly positive reality. My update could be pages and pages long as there is so much to share about Family Camp....but that's too much. Yet there are a couple more things I must share.

Luda –I very very much wanted to include the game ‘Pilgrim,’ based on the book ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’ by John Bunyan. While I have never played it myself, I’ve heard of it for years as the Sudak youth group usually incorporates it into their hikes. ‘Pilgrim’ is like a spiritual treasure hunt, with each station having a character and clue. The clue may or may not make sense at the time and the person/character is either telling the truth or speaking a slippery lie. It is up to the group to try and decide what to do so they can achieve the task and get ‘home’ with their group intact. To make this game happen, my dear friend from Crimea came up to help me.

We have been close friends for some 13 years and she knows my gifts and weaknesses well. This is the same ‘rock’ I leaned on when I put on the Women’s Retreat back in 2012. I knew who I was inviting!

From my side, I have long known that Luda wants to be a missionary. While she very much is one right where she lives, she has wanted to travel somewhere and share Christ there. My invitation wasn’t deep Siberia like she dreams of, but she was thrilled for the opportunity to come and serve alongside me in my new location.

As I knew she would, Luda did a fantastic job. ‘Pilgrim’ was listed on many camp questionnaires as a highlight. For me she was a gift from God, as she was someone I had history with and, as I knew she would, she went over the top to help. It was great fun to have an old friend near by and neat to see how the folks here enjoyed her too.

Pastor Volodia – He was down to his last 2 years in military training (nuclear submarines) when his appendix ruptured. Due to his own procrastination and poor medical practice he nearly died. Then an epidural gone wrong during his 3rd surgery left him paralyzed from the waist down. Yet, now Volodia gives God thanks today for this ‘tragedy’ in his life because God used it to bring Volodia to Himself.

His is an amazing story and it was one of the reason’s I wanted him to be one of the speakers at camp. Like few can, he could speak into the lives of the special needs kids. And, on behalf of their special needs kids, he could speak into the lives of their parents and he’s an awesome example of a life in Christ for the rest of us.

Volodia made the difficult journey from Sevastopol, Crimea to join us and after all he gave out to us, it was hard to hear that on his way back to home, the Ukrainian

border guards forced him to pay ‘a tax’ on the batteries for his electric wheelchair and the guards on the Russian border took his personal Bible. True to form, his response to the situation was, “Maybe they will read it!”

A personal agenda – I admit it. I did have some things I wanted to achieve. They aren’t going to sound weird to you but it is stuff that is rarely done here.

First, in some – even small way - I wanted to have nearly everyone at Family Camp help with some aspect of camp. Why? Because in doing so they would move from receiving to investing. Yes, it’s unpredictable and can be messy but it is worth it, for the blessing they received in giving, and the joy they felt in being included.

Second, learning format. The usual learning format here (Ukraine) is lecture...and it can last 1 – 3 hours! For example, the pastor gives a lecture; everyone listens and that’s all. I, however, presented to them a different format.

Rather than a lecture, we only had a 30-minute talk each day. Then the adults were divided into 4 small groups. For 50 min. the small groups were given the task of answering together specific questions about the talk. The questions were formatted to help them take the theory and turn it into practical. For example: what are ways that God shows His love for me? What are ways I show my love for God? What are ways I show love to others? The group wrote the answers down on big sheets of paper and for the final 20 minutes of the morning, everyone came back together and one person from each group shared what their group had written down.

On the evaluations at the end of camp, small group time was consistently listed as a highlight. God bless the leadership team for taking the step of faith to trust me regarding this new format.

Third, I wanted to ruin status. What I mean is that I wanted to show that no one is *too* important and no one is *not* important. As co-director and the one who through whom the camp was paid for, it could happen that I be given rank above others and I didn’t want that.

It is fun now knowing the language, thus understanding the situation and being able to slip in and help...clean & clear tables, check the bathrooms, pick up garbage and set out snacks. But even more fun than quietly helping out was watching others do the very same thing!!

Vacation Bible School

Family Camp ended on Friday and I was back at the Church of Grace at 9:15am Monday morning to help with VBS. About 6 weeks earlier I had offered to help as a camp nurse and be the camp photographer. They were grateful for the offer. Wonderfully all that was required as a nurse was 1 Band-Aid, 3 Tylenol and

an ace wrap...it was a good week. 1, 200 photos tells you I spent most of my time behind the lens capturing smiles. Obviously it was my first experience at VBS at this church and I respected what I saw. A personal highlight for me was feeling like one of the gang. New is gone. I belong.

In summary, I arrived in Ukraine last November to continue my missionary work but in a new location. During the winter I focused on getting to know my new church in Kiev, ministry partners and location. Then from late spring until the end of summer I was heavily involved in various outreaches. I had been there 9 months before Dad died.

So I tell you about August because it explains November. In God's timing and in His way, there is fruitfulness in obedience. Saying good - bye on December 12th is not going to be easy. But deep down, there is confidence; peace and joy when you know you are in the center of His will.

Blessings, June