

## Update 21, written August 7, 2017

I spent the 3 weeks after Family Camp and before the two July Evangelistic Special Needs camps – resting, getting summer fruit squirreled away in my freezer, visiting friends, catching up on projects and preparing for English camp. After a whole lot of sleep, full freezer and cleaner desk, I felt prepared to enter into another whirlwind.

*“Jesus replied with this story: “A man prepared a great feast and sent out many invitations. When the banquet was ready, he sent his servant to tell the guests, ‘Come, the banquet is ready.’ But they all began making excuses. One said, ‘I have just bought a field and must inspect it. Please excuse me.’ Another said, ‘I have just bought five pairs of oxen, and I want to try them out. Please excuse me.’ Another said, ‘I now have a wife, so I can’t come.’”*

*The servant returned and told his master what they had said. His master was furious and said, ‘Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and invite the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’.....*

I became aware that God was issuing an invitation to the handicapped in Ukraine about 10 -12 years ago. Throughout the country a slow but steady swell of outreaches began to this unreached people group and their families. While I hope that many many many in Ukraine will still turn their hearts to God...the improved economy and business of day-to-day life has dulled their hunger. Excuses come in every color.

To me, it seems as if in the past 15 years the Lord has sent out His servant again – now to the streets and alleys to tell the poor and handicapped that they are personally invited to The Banquet. You are a part of this calling because it is happening in Berdanyisk and Zaporoshja through the church clinics and ministering to the homeless. It is happening in Lutsk at the AGAPE Center (Christian Rehab Center for those with spinal injuries). It is happening here in Brovary, through Grace Baptist Church through the Special Needs ministry. And, wonderfully it is happening in many other cities as well. I feel honored to be a part of it – Luke 14 – the inviting of the poor, crippled, blind and lame.

This was the 6<sup>th</sup> year that the Berean Baptist Church in Mansfield, Ohio has sponsored the 2 Evangelistic Camp for Special Needs children and their moms.

I remember that afternoon sitting across from Tanya K., listening to a litany of hurdles that are related to this outreach and asking out loud, “Is it worth it?” Just as long as that list, was the width of her smile when she said, “Oh yes, Kristina. It is all worth it! It is at the July camps that walls of suspicion fall down, where friendships spring up, relationships are built and the Good News is sown.” She was right. I’ve seen it happen in front of my eyes for 2 summers now.

Compared to the others on the leadership team, I am still the ‘new kid’. But at least it wasn’t my *very* first time like last year was. Thanks to feeling a lot more comfortable and that there were no big health problems this year, I spent more hands on time with the kids and actually spent some time talking with several of the moms.

Tanya focused on inviting many new moms/kids. 20 moms and their special needs come each week and often brothers or sisters come also. The first week we had ratio of about 20% returners to 70% first timers and the second week a ratio of about a 40% to 60%.

While, for them, the camp is free and they are not required to attend the Bible Studies, those coming for the first time are often highly anxious – this perhaps being the first time they’ve traveled to a new place with their child. While Tanya tries to explain at great length what it will be like, it is hard for them to grasp because they don’t know what a Christian Camp is. But, the first group sent out their rave reviews on Facebook to such an extent that the second group could hardly wait to arrive.

Woven between funny morning exercises, games, contests, swimming, crafts, skits, singing, and campfire, the moms are invited to a Bible Study where they looked at the I AM’s of Jesus. I am the door; I am the light of the world; I am the bread of life; I am the Good Shepherd; I am the true vine; I am the way, truth and life; and, I am the resurrection and life.

This year, for the first time ever, we had father’s join us. 3 in fact! While the mom’s met for their study and the kids were in their various classes; the guys had their own group and I heard it went very well.

As you might expect with so many first timers, there were various reactions. One family left the second day because it was a Christian Camp. Many arrived with their guard up. But by just showing care and respect, by Wednesday they relax and Friday finds them sad that the week is almost over.

I thought you might enjoy peeking into our time, so while you are online, you can click on the blue lines below. They are 4 videos that were put together for the campers. The music is in Russian but the pictures are in English :)

First Week:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0A1qK3DPhIk&list=PL-fOcqh2IWbjP8T8E9RjIK25UcmMZmXWx&index=1>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ey22tuH3\\_w&index=3&list=PL-fOcqh2IWbjP8T8E9RjIK25UcmMZmXWx](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ey22tuH3_w&index=3&list=PL-fOcqh2IWbjP8T8E9RjIK25UcmMZmXWx)

Second Week:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CjFVZj37byA&list=PL-fOcqh2IWbjP8T8E9RjIK25UcmMZmXWx&index=2>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BD\\_HH5jPR94&list=PL-fOcqh2IWbjP8T8E9RjIK25UcmMZmXWx&index=4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BD_HH5jPR94&list=PL-fOcqh2IWbjP8T8E9RjIK25UcmMZmXWx&index=4)

On one hand it looks all fun and games...and there is a lot of that. But I chose not to take photos of the kids during a melt down. For many of the kids, camp is stressful as it is the one of the few times they’ve been away from home. While we had deaf, cerebral palsy, Downs Syndrome and some diagnosis that I don’t know how to say, the majority diagnosis for both weeks was autism. So with things being out of routine, the first 3 days there are a lot of screams and tears. Besides the long days, there is a huge output by the staff of patience and creativity.

No less is going on for the moms. Lots of heart stuff is happening with some so used to having to live ‘on alert’, that when they finally relax, they cry. I purposely choose not to take many photos of the class times. To me that is sacred ground. For the majority, at so many levels you can tell the Holy Spirit is working.

My role at the camp was camp nurse. But wonderfully that didn't absorb all of my time so I was able to help in the children's program. I think of my investment into camp from my point of view (watching out for the general health of the camp) but it was interesting to hear later what they parent's thought.

"My daughter has never sat in a strangers lap but she sat in your arms. I was amazed!"

"Thank you for listening."

"Your testimony touched me. Thank you."

English Camp:

I got home on Sunday afternoon from those 2 weeks of camp and was out the door at 8:30 the next morning. For even longer than Borean Baptist Church has been helping with the Special Needs camps, they have been involved with evangelism through English at our church. Besides the 2 people who led the program at the Special Needs camp, 6 more Americans flew in to take part as teachers in an evangelism outreach through English.

160 students took part in the 2-week outreach – the majority not yet having a personal relationship with Christ. Only age 13 and up are allowed and a student can attend once or twice a day – each lesson being 3 hours long. My role was to teach the morning Beginners group during the second week. Having not done this before, I was a little nervous. However, I ended up thoroughly enjoying my group of 10 gals who were ages 13 to 60.

Their questions of – 'Why are you here?' 'How did you learn Russian?' 'How come you work with handicapped kids?' 'What do you like about Ukraine?' were all wide open doors to share about myself, the God I love and what He has done in my life.

*After the servant had done this, he reported, 'There is still room for more.' So his master said, 'Go out into the country lanes and behind the hedges and urge anyone you find to come, so that the house will be full. For none of those I first invited will get even the smallest taste of my banquet.'"* Luke 14:15-24

As a country, Ukraine is now 25 years old and it has experienced religious freedom for the same number of years. This year, with the celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation, there is unparalleled freedom here for the churches. But there will come a day when that freedom ends so we press forward and extend The Invitation while we still can.

Days ahead....

July 14 – 18<sup>th</sup> – Vacation Bible School at our church. I anticipate that there will be about 50 kids. I will be serving as a nurse, preparing the snack and taking pictures.

My prayer is for wisdom & strength for the leadership team; God's preparing of the hearts of the kids & their parents; health & safety and good weather.

Blessings, June