

# Report for work in Mariupol, Ukraine

August 20, 2003

## Greetings!

I hope this report finds you well physically and spiritually. It is hard to believe that it has been three weeks since our return to the United States from Mariupol, Ukraine. Since then, my family has completed our move from Rapid City, SD to Brownsburg, IN. We are settling in nicely and I now have opportunity to share with you the details of our July trip. I want to thank you for your prayers for us while we were away – and thank those of you who supported this work financially. Thanks to everyone who took time out to email us while we were overseas – your kind words really were a source of encouragement.



## My travel companions

Accompanying me on this trip were **Tim Henderson** who preaches for the church in Severn, MD and **Kipp Campbell** who preaches for the church in Clarksville, IN. I have known them both for several years and our time together was pleasurable. We maintained a very good relationship throughout the trip and we worked well together while teaching. This was my second trip abroad conducting foreign evangelistic work and the first for brothers Henderson and Campbell.

## History of the church in Mariupol

In September 2002, Carl McMurray, Shannon Shaffer, and Joshua Creel made a trip to Mariupol on a tip that Alexandra Sinitcena wished to be baptized. Their tip amounted to nothing more than an email from a family member in Argentina who supplied an address and telephone number. After a bible study on the day after they arrived, Alexandra was baptized into Christ. Over the next ten days seven more souls were added to the Lord's body and a local congregation came into existence. After his return to the United States, Brother McMurray contacted me encouraging me to make a trip over to assist these new born Christians. And thus, the rest is history.

Between September and December of last year some problems arose in the congregation. One of the primary problems centered on Sergey who had been baptized on the Creel, Shaffer, and McMurray trip. A former military man, and only source of male spiritual leadership within the congregation, Sergey quickly let his "position" go to his head. He demanded respect since he was the teacher in the group. When some of the women approached him concerning his attitude he responded by leaving the congregation, taking his family with him, along with \$200 of

the church's treasury. In December, Vernon Love, who preaches in Georgia, flew to Mariupol and labored 2 weeks with the brethren. He was able to get Sergey to return the money, but was unable to persuade Sergey to repent. By this time, Sergey no longer allowed his wife to worship. He's made it very hard on his oldest daughter (Olga) to attend and forbids his youngest daughter (Tonya) from attending worship. Even while dealing with these problems, there was great news from Brother Love's trip - He baptized five souls into Christ!

In April, 2003 Jim Deason and Johnny Felker traveled from Tennessee to assist in the work. While there, they were able to further encourage those who had remained faithful, exhort some who were struggling spiritually, and baptize one soul into Christ. Below is a brief look at the members of the church in Mariupol:

NAME	DATE BAPTIZED	COMMENTS
Alexandra Sinitcena	09/02	The leader within the group. Humble heart. She loves the Lord greatly. VERY dedicated! Wants to see the church grow!
Eugenia Golovan	09/02	Very faithful. Attends regularly. She possesses a warm & tender heart. She was very appreciative of our coming to teach.
Olga (Eugenia's daughter)	09/02	Attended only one of our bible studies. Her husband is antagonistic to her faith. She has travel difficulties in getting to worship. Would like to become more involved in study & worship, but has some difficulty in overcoming the obstacles of a small child & unbelieving husband.
Valentine Kostin	12/02	Only active man in the congregation. He is a good man and has a sincere desire to do right. Poor eyesight and a lack of desire prohibit him from taking an active role in a leadership capacity.
Galena Kostin	12/02	Valentine's wife. We always received a very warm greeting from her. All our bible studies were held in their flat.
Sergey	09/02	Fell away late last year. Refuses to repent of sin. Prospects for his return are dim at this time.
Valentina	09/02	Sergey's wife. Forbidden to worship by her husband. She wants Sergey to repent and wants to attend regularly. Sergey has threatened to "throw her out of his house" if she assembles with the Christians.
Tonya	09/02	Sergey & Valentina's younger daughter. (17) Forbidden by her father to attend.
Olga	09/02	Sergey & Valentina's older daughter. (21) Manages to attend regularly - but her father makes life very hard on her.
Marina	09/02	Struggling spiritually. Attended one of our bible studies - but her desire to be faithful is lagging at this time.
Eleanor	12/02	Not willing to give up her worldly life. Battles alcoholism. Attended the July 20 worship service though. Needs encouragement.
Mansoor	12/02	Unfaithful. Battles alcoholism. Did not attend any of our studies.
???	12/02	This is the other person baptized by Vernon Love in December. I've searched through his and other reports trying to find a name - but have been unsuccessful. It's obvious this person has fallen away.
Hamlet	04/02	Not attending regularly. Says he wants to but can't because of his wife's illness and working multiple jobs to cover living expenses. He greeted us warmly - promised to come to our studies when he had a night off, but did not.

Faithful brethren
  Struggling spiritually
  Fallen away

*Since September 2002 there have been 14 baptisms in Mariupol. Of these, 5 have fallen away and at this time their return is not probable. 4 are struggling spiritually due to lack of regular attendance at worship – but there is a chance of them renewing their commitment and starting afresh. The remaining 5 are faithful brothers/sisters in Christ.*

## What we accomplished

Since these new Christians need as much encouragement as possible, I jumped on the opportunity to help. I believe we were successful in accomplishing our task. After arriving in Mariupol on the evening of Friday July 11, our work started the next day and continued through Sunday July 27. We spent three Sundays with them, and with the exception of Saturday the 19<sup>th</sup>, we conducted nightly bible studies in the home of Valentine & Galena Kostin. Some of the topics we studied were:

- **Basics of Christianity**
  - Concentrated on the 4 lesson Home Bible Study Series by Johnny Edwards
- **Commitment to Christian Living**
  - In attending worship services
  - On putting on the *new man* in Christ.
- **Denominationalism**
  - Errors in the Russian Orthodox & Catholic churches
  - The observance of religious holidays
- **End time events**
  - Errors of Premillennial theory & 1000 year reign of Christ
- **Proper usage of the treasury in the local congregation**
- **The need for personal evangelism**
- **God's grace & plan of salvation**

## Private Studies

In addition to the public studies, we held a few private sessions with Alexandra and Emma. Since there is no male spiritual leadership within the congregation presently, Alexandra spent time pouring her heart open to us as to the burden she is faced with. We encouraged her not give up. Her heart is filled with humility and her love for God is great! She desperately wants to see the congregation grow and prosper and has sacrificed much over the last year to keep things going.

Emma is one of Alexandra's oldest friends. Emma has been in the Baptist church for years, but through the influence of Alexandra's teaching she has come to understand there are many things Baptists teach which go against the pattern of the New Testament. She has been meeting with the Christians for some time now. One doctrinal issue that Emma has struggled with has been over the deity of Christ. She was of the opinion that God and Jesus are the same. One evening we held a private study with her that lasted well over an hour. At the onset, she seemed entrenched in her belief. I wondered just how successful our teaching would be since her heart seemed just a little hardened in this area. After showing her passages in John 1, 16, 17, Ephesians 4, and Matthew 3 we could tell her mind was in deep thought. After a

pause, Emma let us know the source of her confusion on this matter. She has been using a bible with a page-by-page commentary which advocates this false doctrine. The scriptures we read made sense, and she announced she would confess her error before the congregation. She thanked us several times for helping her to better understand this matter.

We also studied with Emma concerning her baptism. She was baptized several years ago in the Baptist church and feels her baptism is valid. We felt it important for her to consider being baptized again since her belief in the Godhead had been flawed. We emphasized the Ethiopian eunuch's confession before his baptism, "I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God." (Acts 8:37) We were under the impression that she denied Jesus as the Son of God when she was baptized. She told us she believed correctly when she was baptized, but only changed her belief when handed some tracts by people and purchasing the Bible/commentary. Even after directing her to Acts 19:1-5 as well as encouraging her to consider being rebaptized if there is *any* question about the previous one, she continued to insist her first baptism is valid. She honestly believes she was baptized for the right reason. Only God knows the motive behind her baptism. Perhaps with more teaching and study she will consider her first baptism and consider being baptized again.

## Outlook for the congregation

**I believe the outlook is good for this group** – since the five who are faithful are very dedicated. In the short time they have been Christians they have had ample reason to be discouraged – but their faith has propelled them to continue to endure. They do face large problems. As you have probably gathered, one of the greatest problems facing the group is a lack of male spiritual leadership. I know Alexandra will continue doing a great job teaching, but she told us repeatedly of her desire to be fed spiritually instead of doing all the feeding. She is leading because she **has to** not because she has *pushed her way into it*.

There is also a tremendous need **for more teachers to assist in the work at Mariupol**. After the McMurray, Shaffer, and Creel trip last year there was a nationwide call for teachers to go in and help these brethren. Since September of 2002 only three groups have gone over (i.e., in December, April, and ours in July.) Thus, our brothers and sisters in Mariupol are faced with **long** periods of time between teachers coming in to help. At this time there are a few making plans to go over later this year (October & December) but that is it. There is an extreme need for more teachers! Can you help? Do you know of anyone who could help? They are so appreciative of anyone who can help out.

**Our brethren in Mariupol face hard economic conditions**. We were told that more people wanted to come to our bible studies but had to work. July is a busy time for them as summer brings increased chores around their *dormas*. (Russian for "home") Raising crops in their gardens is very important as it supplies much of their food during the winter months. They do this to live. Ukraine has one of the poorest economies in Europe. Poverty is everywhere. Much of what we take for granted in the US would be considered a luxury. The average factory worker makes around 1000-1300 hryvnia per month – around \$250-300 US dollars. The Christians that make up the church at Mariupol are mostly older and receive pensions of 150 hryvnia per month. So they work on top of that just to survive.

On top of this, **they live in a culture full of worldly vice.** There is a constant temptation to return to the *former way of life*. But again, the Christians in the “core group” have an extreme love for the Lord and are grounded enough to withstand the pressure of conforming to the world. I was impressed with their openness and honesty. They want to do right – no matter what.

There **was also an interest in personal evangelism.** I know that Valentine & Galena invited friends and family members everyday while we were there. Finally, on the last day of our visit, their niece, Luidmilla, came to worship services. Alexandra also worked hard giving out personal invitations and her work was rewarded one evening when a longtime friend of hers name Sveta attended one of our studies. The following evening she brought one of the members of her extended family with her (Anatoli). I know they will continue to get the word out about the gospel message. Isn't this great?!? It all goes back to a tremendous love for God!

## Personal thoughts

This trip was a most rewarding experience. Even through the language barrier, we recognized our common bond of Christianity and love for Jesus. Their open hearts and desire to do right continue to be an inspiration to us. We've been humbled by the opportunity to teach them.

There is no doubt in my mind that making this trip was worth all the preparation, work, and pain of separation from loved ones here at home. It has once again reminded me of the great potential in foreign evangelism. These new born babes in Christ have a sincere *longing* for the pure milk of the word. (1 Peter 2:2) What an honor to know them and to encourage them! If the Lord wills, sometime in the next 12-18 months I will be able to return and further encourage these good brothers and sisters in Christ. Thanks again for giving me the opportunity to serve in this capacity. Please continue to remember these good brethren in your prayers.

For His Service

Matthew Allen

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## NAMES & ADDRESSES OF BRETHREN IN MARIUPOL, UKRAINE

Valentine & Galena Kostin...

Kostin Valentine  
Ilyich District  
24 kvartal 9-7  
Mariupol  
Donetsk  
87513 Ukraine

Alexandra Sinitsina

Sinitsina Alexandra  
Ilyich District  
24 kvartal 9-9  
Mariupol  
Donetsk  
87513 Ukraine

Evgenia Golovan

Golovan Evgenia  
Ilyich District  
24 Kvartal 8-1  
Mariupol  
Donetsk  
87513 Ukraine

Olga (Sergey's daughter)  
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**View**  
**Tim Henderson's Report**  
**Kipp Campbell's Report**  
**Daily Journal Entries from our**  
**Trip**  
**100's of pictures of Ukraine,**  
**brethren, and sights in Kiev**  
**at**  
**<http://mhallen.hendersons.net>**

## Financial Disclosure

### Support received:

Gilbert church of Christ, Gilbert, AZ	\$500
Greenwood church of Christ, Greenwood, IN	\$500
Northside church of Christ, Greenwood, AR	\$1000
Cleveland church of Christ, Cleveland, TX	\$500
Alayne Hunt, Brownsburg, IN	\$100
N. Beach St. church of Christ, Ft. Worth, TX	\$500
Brownsburg church of Christ, Brownsburg, IN	\$500
Westside church of Christ, Yuma, AZ	\$200
Noble Hill church of Christ, Brighton, MO	\$500
<b>TOTAL SUPPORT RECEIVED:</b>	<b>\$4300</b>

### Expenses incurred:

Trip Preparation	\$ 150
Document Fees	\$ 222
Teaching Supplies	\$ 83
Airfare (roundtrip from Rapid City, SD)	\$ 1722
Misc. Supplies	\$ 128
Living Expenses	\$ 1000
Food	\$ 280
Transportation in Ukraine	\$ 125
Communication	\$ 50
Translator	\$ 90
Benevolence	\$ 50
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$ 3900</b>

As you see from the above figures, I was able to return with support leftover. I've had a few ideas as what to do with the left over funds:

- ✓ Purchase the brethren new communion ware and unleavened bread. (They currently use 8-10 shot glasses for communion cups.) As the congregation grows, it is obvious they'll need something better than what they have presently.
- ✓ Keep the funds and use it to purchase study material the congregation may need.
- ✓ Use the leftover funds toward a future trip in 2004.

Or, I will be glad to return to you a portion of what is left over. If you desire to do this, please contact me as soon as possible. I plan on keeping you updated as to the happenings of the congregation in Mariupol. Please continue to pray for the work there and for those who will travel there in the coming months to help these brethren *grow in the grace & knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.* (2 Pet. 3:18)