



San Angelo Standard-Times

Local group helping Ukrainian missionary

By Perry Flippin, editor emeritus, pflippin@sastandardtimes.com or 659-8217

August 24, 2006

After 70 years of communist repression to stamp out religion in the Soviet Union, a 32-year-old Ukrainian missionary is planting Christian churches in the Crimea.

Daniel Prebyschuk, accompanied by his sister, Lisa Potapenko, addressed the Business Men's Bible Study group Sunday in San Angelo as part of a two-month-long whistle-stop tour of American relatives and friends.



Daniel Prebyschuk



Lisa Potapenko

The Rev. Darrell T. Smith, a San Angelo pharmacist and Baptist pastor, has been visiting Ukraine since 1991. He and his wife, Kay, formed the Gospel Vision Foundation some 11 years ago to spread the redemptive story of Jesus.

Since 2002, their San Angelo-based foundation has supported Prebyschuk's mission to nearly 50 million Ukrainians - more than double the population of Texas - who occupy a democratic republic slightly smaller than the Lone Star State.

Potapenko, who has lived with her husband since 2002 in Goshen, Ind., translated remarks by her brother, who speaks no English.

"The main theme of my message is salvation," said Prebyschuk, the father of four. He has been senior pastor at his church for 10 years.

Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Prebyschuk's family played hide-and-seek with police trying to squelch worship services held secretly in homes, in forests and in the dead of night.

"Our family had lots of arrests and tickets because of our ministry," Potapenko said, adding that her brother began preaching the gospel at age 10. From among nine children, the blond pair are endowed with piercing sky-blue eyes.

Crimea has 1,080 towns and villages, but only 300 churches.

"Eight hundred villages have no churches," Prebyschuk said, "because nobody came and shared the Gospel with them."

In the past three years, he and a dozen subordinate pastors have planted 50 churches. His vision for the next five years is to plant 200 more churches. Smith said supporting Ukrainian missionary costs about \$150 a month.

With his evangelical approach, Prebyschuk avoids both the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions. We preach the gospel of Grace- salvation comes through no other name than that of Jesus Christ.

Along with his spiritual message, the pastor addresses seemingly intractable physical and social ills: 3 million alcoholics, 2 million drug addicts, 100,000 orphans, hospitals without food for patients, and no government-supported schools for rural children.

Prebyschuk's church, called "Love of Christ," feeds 400 street children daily. It also operates two rehabilitation centers, each capable of accommodating 30 clients for eight months. An orphanage cares for 30 children.

For six months each year, two evangelistic tents range through towns and villages conducting revival meetings and introducing listeners to the "good news" of the New Testament.

Calling his approach "practical evangelism," Prebyschuk said he aims to break the cycle of poverty and despair by appealing to children and young people. In so doing, maybe their parents will take an interest in hearing the Gospel message.

With money raised in San Angelo and elsewhere, the Ukraine mission buys food, medicine and clothing for needy people.

"Our main thrust," Smith said, "is to train young leaders to preach and start churches." We now have approximately 60 Church Planters- missionaries on staff. All are working hard to achieve our goal of reaching every man, woman and child in Ukraine with the gospel of Jesus Christ within the next 10 years.

He described his foreign mission experiences as "an adventure with God," saying the countless changed lives have been humbling and exciting.

Ukraine, Smith continued, is a shining example of people peacefully overthrowing a fraudulent election this year and getting the new president, Vladimir Yushchenko, being sworn in with his hand on a Bible - a practice never before seen.

After their West Texas visit, Prebyschuk and Potapenko went to Chicago; Minneapolis and Washington, D.C., for a conference he was invited to address.

"Communism had so many problems," he said. "That's why we have to continue this ministry, so God can change their lives."

The Gospel Vision Foundation

www.gospelvision.org