



(RITE - CANADA)

VOLUME 4, NO 1

JUNE 2013

Unity In Christ Transcends All Cultural Barriers

On Thursday, May 2 at 7:00 a.m., I began a journey from Neerlandia, Alberta that would take me to Donetsk, Ukraine by late Saturday night. After one flight, I met up with my teaching partner, Rev. Dick Moes, in Toronto where we experienced a flight cancellation that delayed our planned arrival on Friday night, by a day for me and by two days for Rev. Moes. An unexpected night in Toronto motel actually made the trip a little easier, although a missed flight on another airline added considerable expense for us both.

The Seminary

The two weeks of teaching at the RITE seminary went quickly. We stayed in a small, second floor, two bedroom apartment with all the necessary items including Wi-Fi by which we could keep in touch with home. I soon established a daily routine of getting up early for personal Bible reading and a run along the river before making my own breakfast, after which we were picked up at 8:15 a.m. for the 20 minute ride to the seminary. Rev. Moes taught all the students in the morning in four, 45 minute classes with five or ten minute breaks between each class. After a hot noon meal prepared for all the students and staff by a seminarian's wife, I taught all afternoon, also in four 45 minute classes.

Although I began the adventure with some fear and trembling, I now look back upon it with a profound sense of gratitude for the opportunity, and for the grace of God that equipped and sustained me in answer to many prayers. I am especially grateful to my brother, Rev. Moes, chairman of RITE Canada, for the invitation to accompany him on this teaching trip and for the encouragement and companionship we enjoyed while together. Rev. Moes was there for the third time and is working his way through Calvin's *Institutes*, covering Book Three on this trip. I covered two subjects, Eschatology beginning with the Olivet Discourse and the book of Deuteronomy as a commentary on the Ten Commandments.

It is hard to imagine that in only nine days of actual teaching I could have developed close bonds of fellowship with people of a different language and culture, yet that is what happened with both the students and translators. Parting was with some sorrow even though I was anxious to return home. Our unity in Christ truly transcends all cultural boundaries and binds us together as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

IN THIS ISSUE:

Page 1	Unity IN Christ Transcends All Cultural Barriers
Page 3	A RITE "Rookie" goes to Donetsk
Page 4	Coppers For Donetsk
Page 5	Support A Student

Students and Translators

A few of the students are ordained pastors, but most are young men desirous of sound Biblical teaching and are considering some form of ministry. We had fifteen students. There were two women students, one the wife of another student and one who came with her pastor. Some of the students travel quite a distance to be there, most by public transportation. They come for two weeks every month except July and December, and stay in dorm rooms upstairs in the seminary building, going home on the weekend. They were attentive and took extensive notes. They expressed gratitude for the instruction we gave, and we benefited from questions that required us to dig deeper into the material we were presenting. The students come from a variety of backgrounds including Pentecostal, Baptist and Arminian but they are willing to consider the Reformed faith and several have embraced it or are in a process of transition in their thinking. We also spent time in individual conversations dealing with their personal struggles or questions. Four of the students were able to converse in English and one understood English well enough to translate for me for a short time when one of our translators was called away by an important phone call.

We worked with two excellent translators, Natasha, who is also the local administrator of the seminary and Anya, a young woman who is engaged to be married to a man in Texas. She will be sorely missed when she moves to the US.

The Seminary Building

The seminary building is still under construction. The next major project is a much-needed kitchen and dining area. Currently all the food is prepared off site and eaten in a room planned as a second classroom. On our last day, the power went off for a few hours in the morning and the food for the noon meal that would have been reheated in a microwave was served cold. The room for the kitchen and dining area is now used for storage of construction equipment. After we returned home, we learned that the money needed to finish the kitchen had been raised so hopefully the construction work will get underway soon.

Video recordings were made of our lectures. Some of the students use them for review or show them to members of their congregations. It is hoped that in the future the videos will be available at the RITE website where anyone could access them. The students were introduced to a web based, institutional program to teach English so that they can have

access to more theological works. While there we also learned that Logos, an expensive and scholarly Bible computer program, is seeking translators in many different languages, including Russian, to broaden its usefulness. It is possible that a few of the students could assist in that effort and gain access to the program that would otherwise be beyond their means. Some of Rev. Moes' lecture notes were translated into Russian using the Google translation website. Although the syntax of the translation was sometimes so bad that the students could barely understand it, when they heard the oral presentation, the translated notes became intelligible and a good help for them.

The City of Donetsk

In addition to the work at the seminary, I had opportunity to gain some knowledge and experience of Donetsk and its surrounding area. In many ways, the city is very beautiful. There are impressive public buildings, large plazas with statuary, pedestrian walk ways, green spaces, streets lined with flowering trees, traffic circles with intricately designed flower beds, a new soccer stadium (host to the 2012 UEFA European Football Championship) and fascinating open air markets. But there is also a great deal of poverty and the standard of living for most is quite below Western standards. Alcoholism, gambling and lotteries, homelessness, and an entitlement mentality are major problems. The adverse effects of a century of communism, socialism and state enforced atheism (under the former Soviet Union) will not be overcome easily or quickly, and perhaps not without a reformation through the transforming power of the Gospel.

A Visit To A Church Plant

On the middle weekend, I was taken two hours out into the country to preach in a small church in a little village. The poverty there was profound but the people were warmhearted and hospitable. To get to the church in the countryside, a member of the congregation made a four hour round trip by car in the morning to pick up me and my translator. The church planned for us to take a bus back to Donetsk at the end of the day but when they went to buy our tickets at the ticket office, they discovered that the seats on the bus were all sold out. However, that did not prevent the bus driver from taking money from our host and allowing us and about 20 others to stand in the aisle for the two and a half hour bus ride home. The bus was stopped by the police on the way back, we think because there were people standing in the aisle, which is against the law there, but it was settled

very quickly, as if it were a routine matter. I was told that most roadside stops by police are settled with a bribe and that corruption is a problem at every level of government.

The trip home was the hardest part of the whole adventure. I went 32 hours without sleep, including four flights and the almost two hour drive home from the Edmonton airport. I experienced no jet lag going

to Donetsk, but for a week after arriving back in Canada, I was ready for a nap at anytime of the day. However, the hardships of travel would not deter me from going again or recommending the trip to others if God in his providence gives opportunity.

*Ralph Pontier
Pastor of Emmanuel Reformed Church (URCNA)
in Neerlandia, Alberta*



A RITE “Rookie” goes to Donetsk

After passing through customs in the Donetsk airport, I soon found myself in the loneliest position any air traveler can experience – standing alone at the still rotating, but empty, baggage carousel, longingly peering up into the chute where I hoped to see the familiar sight of my suitcase at any moment. All of my other fellow travelers from Flight 2542 were happily on their way home as I continued to gaze into that black hole hoping for some sign of luggage life. Then it happened – the flashing caution light went dark, the carousel stopped its turning, and I was left alone

I found a lady wearing a security uniform, and, with sad face, arm motions, and body language, I described to her my situation. She must have played charades before because she

seemed to understand my dilemma and motioned for me to follow. She handed me off to a very tall, young Ukrainian man, and again, with a charade-like skill that I never knew I had, I explained my dilemma a second time. This young man had never played charades, however. He was a cheerful sort, though, and smiled real big as he said to me in a thick Russian accent, “Welcome to Donetsk!”

Maybe he understood my gyrations better than I thought! After several more welcomes, two elevator rides, and a walk down a long narrow corridor, my new Ukrainian friend introduced me to a lady in a Lufthansa uniform who explained to me in a mix of English, German and Russian that my suitcase was still in Germany and would not arrive until the next day. The young man returned me to the spot where

we were first introduced, welcomed me yet again to Donetsk, and left me there, alone again.

With all of this delay, not only was I missing a suitcase, but I had missed my ride as well! For about ten minutes I pondered my options: (1) I could sit, or (2) I could stand. I stood, hoping that would make me look even more conspicuously lost. My strategy worked! After what seemed to be hours, a lady came up to me and asked, "Are you Mark Smith?" It was Natasha. We exchanged greetings and were soon on our way to the "Professor's Apartment" in downtown Donetsk.

After my inauspicious arrival and a sleepless night, Natasha arrived again on Monday morning to take me and Win (Groseclose) to the school. This, of course, is the reason I came; I had even said as much when I passed through customs: "I am here to teach Christian theology," I told the officer behind the window. And, for two weeks, eight hours each day, that's what I did. And, oh yeah, I drank a whole lot of hot, black tea in the process. But something else happened as well, something that I didn't expect: I fell in love with all of the students of RITE, with Natasha

and Yana – our translators, and with all the people that I met in the course of those two weeks.

I've been home for several weeks now, and people are still asking me, "How was your trip to Ukraine?" I tell them about some of the sights I saw, about the city of Donetsk, and other things that I experienced, but most of all, I tell them about RITE and the new members of my family who live in Ukraine. I went with the hopes of giving, but I received from them and from the Lord much more than I gave.

Mark Smith

Mark was born and raised in Atlanta, GA. He completed his undergraduate and graduate studies in Reformation history at Georgia State University. He served as a Church Planter and Pastor in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church from 1990 through 2005. He is currently the Pastor of Forest Presbyterian Church in Forest, MS, where he has resided with his wife and four children since 2003. In 2006, he transferred his credentials to the Presbyterian Church in America

Ways in which you can help

Set up a 'Mission Circle.' Participate in sending warm clothes to the students and their families and extended families. This alleviates some of the material concerns and worries and frees up some finances for perhaps meat on the table or fruit for the children. You can make hats, mitten, scarves, afghans, slippers, pneumonia prevention vests for the children, sweaters, etc.

Coppers for Donetsk

Please help the students of the Reformed International Theological Seminary (R.I.T.E.) in Donetsk, Ukraine by saving your pennies or small change.

Coppers for Donetsk Program

Start the 'Coppers for Donetsk project in your church, your society, your social group, your community. Pennies add up.

The Coppers for Donetsk Program is working well and we are thankful to God for that. If you need some extra cans for your neighbors and friends and local businesses, please do not hesitate to ask for them. We will be happy to oblige. We hope to have 1000 cans out by the end of the year 2011. This would create a wonderful help for the seminary. We have received cans with \$5.00 in them and also as much as \$80.00! We receive them weekly from all over and from all kinds of businesses and people from all walks of life.



For more information of how to start this project please email theavandixhoorn@rogers.com

Support A Student

It is possible to support a student attending the Reformed International Theological Seminary in Donetsk. The cost per student is very reasonable by Canadian standards, yet it makes an enormous impact in the spiritual lives of these students and their churches in Ukraine. The total cost of operating the seminary in Donetsk includes renting the professors' apartment, renting seminary classroom space, translator's salaries, utilities, student stipends, desk, chairs, library and other miscellaneous expenses. At the present time we have between 80-100 good solid theological library books written in Russian for our students to use.

You can *Support a Student* on several different levels:

Level 1 For \$100 a month, you can fund a student's monthly stipend.

Level 2 For \$120 a month, you can fund a student's monthly stipend and cover their transportation, food and lodging for a month.

Level 3 For \$200 a month, you can fund the entire cost of operating the seminary for a month per student.

Level 4 Any contribution to help with the monthly cost of operating the seminary would be greatly appreciated. You can make either a one-time gift, an occasional gift or regular support for one or more students.

If you would like to participate in the *Support A Student* program, please send your Name, Address, E-mail address to the information listed on the bottom of this page.

If you would like to donate to RITE-CANADA or participate in the *Support A Student* program, please send your Name, Address, E-mail address, and let us know what level of support to this address:

RITE Canada
C/O Kuhn & Company
#100 - 32160 South Fraser Way
Abbotsford, BC
V2T 1W5
Attn: Ian Moes

Please make cheques payable to RITE CANADA.

RITE CANADA is a registered charitable organization pursuant to the provisions of the Income Tax Act (Canada) under registration number 85102 4000 R0001.

100% of all contributions go directly to support the seminary in Donetsk, Ukraine .