



On Street Evangelism and Christmas in Ukraine

Jacob Bluebaugh, an American missionary who lives in Ukraine, recently taught an ITEM class at Kiev Regional Bible College, his third since 2017. He spoke with ITEM about missionary life.

What are Ukrainians' attitudes toward Americans?

Generally, they like Americans, especially if they can learn/practice English. Despite the wavering actions of the last two presidents, Ukrainians generally believe Americans stand with them and support them. They desperately want the strengths of an alignment with the U.S. Oh, and they LOVE McDonalds. The location in the center of town is said to be one of the busiest in the world.

If/when you talk to Ukrainians on the street about faith issues, how do they respond?

Street evangelism is very difficult here. That is due to the fact that the Jehovah's Witnesses can be found at train stations and bus stations every day. Anyone attempting similar tactics is viewed as cultish. Ukrainians take a good while to warm up and trust people. Only a few weeks ago did I learn

of spiritual abuse a friend has endured from the Eastern Orthodox church. The door is opening, but trust takes time.

Making matters more difficult: Ukrainians love to argue for recreation. If they perceive that a side is not represented, they will take that side even if they don't believe/agree with it. Try debating someone who will take any position to ensure fair representation.

As a missionary in a foreign land, what is the biggest challenge you face in day-to-day life, and how do you address it?

Language is the top issue. My language learning has been slow since I largely teach in an English context. This has led to numerous humbling experiences when I can't communicate because I have exhausted what I know.

Many Ukrainians are friendly enough to help when I need it. Google Translate helps with shopping and posted instructions unless it has been written in Cyrillic cursive. When it comes to landlord issues or apartment hunting, we have a dear friend who gladly helps us in return for some of my wife's baked goods.

Is there a Christmas season over there? If so, what's it like?

Christmas is incredible here. Ukraine celebrates Christmas twice: Western Christmas on Dec. 25 and Eastern Christmas on Jan. 7. However, the big gift giving day in Ukraine is actually New Year's Day. Families traditionally set up their trees then, too.

Every year, they set up a giant tree in front of the 11th Century St. Sophia Cathedral along with a Christmas market full of tremendous food.



ITEM Explores Expanding into Cuba and Ethiopia

By Tom Smith, ITEM Executive Director

Dipping flatbread *injera* into spicy vegetable stew and sleeping on the mud floor of a church could be a new experience for ITEM instructors in the near future. Ethiopia has a growing evangelical church, and there are many first-generation believers who are also pastors in need of training. ITEM will be exploring a site in Ethiopia where 50 or more pastors are being trained in a market town within walking distance of the villages where these men live.

Bringing the training as close to where the students live makes education more accessible to the pastors-students. It is inexpensive. And it also keeps them from being caught by temptations of life in the big cities. But it also means that the instructors will need to live like their students for at least a week.

ITEM is also exploring Cuba as a new field. The Reformed Seminary of Latin America has sites in Havana, Holguin, Velasco and Guantanamo. Some 250 students come from all over the island to attend classes. We are told that they are enthusiastically embracing Reformed teaching. We are also told that our instructors will need to be flexible when traveling to Cuba and following the rules and regulations placed upon them.

Throughout its history, ITEM instructors have been hardy and flexible men. As the Lord opens doors in new places, those attributes will be tested. Just as Jesus came and lived among us, our instructors have gone, are going and will go to foreign places to live alongside their students. ITEM's mission is to bring Bible-based, Reformed teaching to indigenous church leaders for ministry. We bring the training to the students, no matter where they live in the world.

Prayer Requests

1. Thank the Lord for the good health report on Janis Perkons in Riga, Latvia. He is doing better and does not appear to have cancer. Please continue to pray for full recovery.
2. Thank the Lord for Jacob Bluebaugh, a full time missionary in Kiev, who was a last-minute substitution to teach in Kiev in November. Pray for his ministry and his wife, who is expecting their first child in the spring of 2020.
3. Pray for political stability in Bolivia and Colombia. Bill Koopmans was scheduled to go teach in Cochabamba but had to cancel due to political protests raging across Bolivia. SRL's main campus is in Medellin, Colombia, which is also facing political unrest. Pray SRL can continue to function normally as they prepare students for ministry.
4. Thank the Lord for safe and successful travels for Will Hesterberg and Tom Smith as they presented the work of ITEM and recruited future instructors in November.

How to Contribute

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