

Go Preach the Gospel



To the Whole World

“How Shall They Hear?”

Training Men to Preach in Their Native Lands
A Work of the Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver

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Teachers and Graduates of Bear Valley Bible Institute Ukraine

A TEAM EFFORT

Sarah and I returned to Ukraine for the first time since 2007, having previously visited there four times. We were delayed an hour at Chicago O’Hare, barely caught the plane in Munich, but finally arrived in Donetsk, Ukraine on schedule. Dennis Sopelnik, BVBIU Director, then drove us forty minutes to Gorlovka, where the school is located.

We arrived in time for the BVBIU graduation Saturday, May 26. I spoke to the graduates from Isaiah 6, and Howell Ferguson, Ukraine Coordina-

tor, further challenged them to use their training wisely. Dennis Sopelnik and Andre Zhuravlev presented the diplomas to the students. Friends and relatives of the graduates then joined the congregation in a fitting celebration of their graduation.

I taught New Testament Theology and the Gospel of John to the Graduate students while the undergraduate students were on break.

The two newest students had just received their B.S. in Bible the day before. The

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week of classes is packed with lecture, discussion, quizzes and tests. The students then have two months to do the research assignments. Albert Bagdasarian receives and grades their work.

Sarah taught Ephesians to ladies from the church at Gorlovka. When she was not teaching, she was working on a book especially for those who teach the Old Testament to children. (She should have this book in publication before the end of the year)

Sarah and I were thankful to be there with Howell Ferguson and Mary Ferguson. Howell serves as Coordinator of the Bear Valley Extensions in Ukraine and Chimala. Sarah and I had first met Howell and Mary when they were serving as missionaries in Tanzania during the time that the Andrew Connally School of Preaching began. They are a team with “the heart of missionaries.”

Sarah and I stayed in a student’s apartment about 15 minutes from the school. Many of the apartments, which date from the Kruschev era, are often uncomfortable and inefficient. However, this apartment was newly refurbished, safe, clean and comfortable. The owner of the apartment, **Eugene**, is one of the students in the Institute. He is fluent in Ukrainian, Russian and English and was my translator when I spoke at the Bear Valley graduation. At our departure, Sarah and I got to meet Eugene’s wife and three children.

Time spent with faithful Christians is precious. After a week in Gorlovka, Sarah and I, Howell and Mary and Dennis Sopelnik, his wife and daughter **visited Lynn Allison and her husband, Victor, in Donetsk.** In 2007 Sarah and Lynn had spoken at a Ladies Day in Donetsk where Lynn and Victor attended. Shortly afterward, Lynn and Victor married and have been serving God faithfully since then.

Andrew Zhuravlev, BVBIU graduate, who preaches at Gorlovka and teaches in the Institute, **had his 40th birthday** while we were there and invited several of us to attend. Sarah and I had met Andrew while he was studying at BVBIU and preaching at the small town of Ilivisce about an hour from Gorlovka. We visited Ilivisce on three occasions with Andrew and his family. I preached;

Sarah taught ladies’ and children’s classes, and we became very close to Andrew and to the congregation.

Many members in the congregation in Gorlovka remember when it was illegal to have a Bible and meet publicly for worship. They become Christians through much difficulty and have remained faithful when others have disappointed and deserted them. They know the meaning of the scripture: “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven...” (Matt. 5:12).

Two and a half weeks came too soon, but we left Ukraine with the knowledge that faithful men and women are teaching the gospel and serving Christ in the midst of great opposition. But they are not alone! Many American Christians and churches are reaching across the world in concern, prayer and commitments to strengthen and train them.

—Gary Fallis

SLAVIANSK AND BEAR VALLEY BIBLE INSTITUTE UKRAINE

The first Church of Christ was founded in **Slaviansk in 1989** as the result of the missionary trip of **Ivan M. Kolesnikow**. At that time he baptized several of his close relatives. **Clifford Yeldell**, then made possible the beginning of the **Slaviansk Bible School in 1991**. Bro. Yeldell, who at that time coordinated the missionary efforts in the former Soviet Union, negotiated with the officials of the Slaviansk Power Constructional Technical School for the rent of several rooms in their buildings for the school. **R.C. Polk**, who worked for the Southern Christian University in Alabama, was the first director. Christians from Russia, Byelorussia, Armenia and Ukraine became the first students of this school. I was one of those students, and my wife, Irene, was one of the interpreters. The school existed till August of 1993.

Students of the Slaviansk Bible School and American missionaries helped begin the **church in Kramatorsk in 1993**. In 1994 **Gene Clemmons**, also a missionary, **started a school of interpreters in Slaviansk**. My wife, Irene, trained the students

of one of the private Language Institutes who wanted to become qualified interpreters. These students worked as interpreters during evangelism campaigns for several years after their training, and many of them became faithful Christians.

At that time there were few Churches of Christ in the Donetsk region, and their preachers had very little spiritual education. That is why experienced brethren began to offer classes for preachers in **1994 at the State Foreign Language Institute of Gorlovka**. **Owen Farley** was one of the teachers. We became better prepared to teach the gospel to our own countrymen and begin congregations where they could worship. Students had to travel to these classes by local electric trains where it was hot in summer and cold in winter. Despite all these difficulties, we regularly attended the classes in order to improve our knowledge of the Bible.

In September of 1997 the Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver, Colorado began a Bible School in Kramatorsk. We could now receive more extensive spiritual preparation for our work as evangelists. The first Dean of the Extension School was the late **Buck Hall**, followed by **Terry Harmon**. Terry married Marina, a Ukrainian Christian, and remained as Dean for almost ten years. Terry and Marina finally had to return to the United States because of the illness of their younger son. However, Terry had wisely trained his replacement, **Dennis Sopelnik**, who now serves as the Director of BVBIU. Dennis is a graduate of Bear Valley Bible Institute of Ukraine.

The first class received their B.S. in Bible from Bear Valley in 2002, and the Master's Program began the same year. All the graduates from the first class continued their study at the Master's level. The majority of the courses in BVBIU are now taught by Ukrainian graduates: Vlad Pazyi, Vitally Rodichev, Victor Semikoz, Albert Bagdasarian, Andrew Zhuravlev and Dennis Sopelnik. (You can see their pictures in the photograph on the front page, GF).

The Bible Institute moved to Gorlovka in 2007 where we now have a very adequate facility to train preachers for decades. The building has two class rooms, more if needed. This is accompanied

by several offices, a large library, a large space where the local church meets, an apartment for visiting teachers and more. A new boiler was added to warm students in the cold winters of Ukraine. **In May of this year we celebrated the 10th, "jubilee", graduation of the Bear Valley Bible Institute Ukraine.**

God "who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" has made it possible to teach the Bible to faithful Christians who will be able to teach others in Ukraine and other areas of the former Soviet Union. **The seed that was planted in 1989-1990 in Slaviansk** reminds us of Jesus' Kingdom parable of a "mustard seed" which grew and became a tree so that many could find shade under its branches (cf. Matt. 13:21-33). I have only mentioned a few -- Americans, Ukrainians, and others, past and present -- who are part of the planting and receiving of God's Word in the Donetsk region of Ukraine. We can be thankful to them and so many others who serve the King of Kings in His eternal kingdom.

—**Albert Bagdasarian**



Albert and Irene Bagdasarian and daughter, Anna

DISCOVERING THE PAST

On July 25, I preached at the Beltline congregation in Irving, Texas as part of their summer series. One of the new members whom I'd met only briefly in the past is Clifford Yeldell, whom Albert mentions in his article. Afterward, Clifford and I realized we had more connections than just the fact that his wife, Faye, is a friend from our past work at Brown Trail. I enjoyed learning more about the early work in Ukraine, and he enjoyed hearing my update, especially knowing that Albert and Irene are still faithfully serving God. As soon as I came home, I emailed Albert about meeting Clifford, and he sent me several early pictures. I've shared them with Clifford, and we plan to get together and "connect the dots" of the work in Gorlovka. Here is a sample. —**Gary Fallis**



Ukrainian Christians—1994
Albert and Irene Bagdasarian (on right)

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