



SBA

The Link

DECEMBER 2017

Odessa, Ukraine Report by Pastor Jon Pettinger

I suppose I had a bit of an unusual route to becoming a pastor. Shortly after Katha and I were married, I began studying in the aviation program at Providence College, in hope of serving as a pilot on the mission field. By the time I completed the program, I was beginning to see something I had tried to ignore. Besides studying at Providence, I was also a youth leader at the church we were attending, and I was enjoying this pastoral work more than flying. My degree— which focused on aviation, eventually led to my becoming a youth pastor! As I served as a pastor, I recognized a need to become better equipped for the work that God had called me to do. I spent the first eight years of my pastoral ministry as a part-time student, completing a Master of Divinity in 2015. During the years as a student and pastor I learned to treasure the education I received.

I know the kind of a pastor I was when I began, and I know the kind of pastor I am now. Of course, much has been learned in the “school of life” but, as least as much has been learned in the classroom under the guidance of wise men and women. In short, I believe that good education is one of the tools God uses to build good pastors. Out of appreciation for the way that education has shaped me, I want to pass on what I have learned to others who are seeking to serve God. Since joining Melville Baptist Church, and the North American Baptist Conference, I have paid careful attention to the NAB’s efforts to help equip ministers in Brazil, the Philippines, Russia and Ukraine.

This October, with the enthusiastic support of Melville Baptist Church, I was able to teach at one of those institutions that the NAB supports— Odessa Theological Seminary in Ukraine.



Odessa Theological Seminary is the oldest evangelical seminary in the former Soviet Union. During the turbulent and exciting days of the early nineties, the founders of Odessa Theological Seminary sought to take advantage of the new freedom they were experiencing by founding a Seminary in the Soviet Union. Of course, the logical place for such a seminary was Moscow but, unable to secure space in Moscow, they decided to begin in Odessa. When the doors in Moscow opened they would be able to hit the ground running, but what began as a temporary situation became permanent.

Odessa Theological Seminary is now firmly established offering 15 different programs to 375 students, preparing them for ministry in the church. I taught students in the school's 3-year bachelor program. These students were preparing for service in Pastoral, Women's, Children's and Youth Ministry.

Regina and Odessa are separated by 8500 kilometers, and it took us a few connecting flights to get there. We had stops in Toronto, London, and Vienna, but far from being an inconvenience, this was a blessing. We extended our stop in Vienna and were able to spend a few days visiting with Katha's parents who drove down from Germany to see us.

After two days in Vienna, we closed our suitcases and continued our journey. As we stood at the luggage carousel in Odessa, I wondered what we would do if there was no one to pick us up on the other side of the sliding doors. Thankfully, the first thing I saw when the doors opened was the smiling face of Andrew— my interpreter for the week, holding a sign with my name on it. We officially arrived in Ukraine when we walked across the street and crowded into a Lada for the ride to the Seminary. We spent the next half hour marveling at the driver's ability to maneuver this piece of soviet technology at high speeds between even the smallest gaps in traffic. Like Moses parting the Red Sea, our driver could turn two lanes into three! As we weaved through traffic, Andrew turned around from his passenger seat and said, "First question. Can you preach tomorrow?" Speaking in faith that I would survive the ride to the Seminary, I said, "Yes."

The next day I found myself standing in front of a congregation that met in a church building on the campus of the Seminary— the second of three preachers during the service! Of course, the reason for the trip was to teach at the Seminary and on Monday morning the class on Revelation began.

The English writer G.K. Chesterton once quipped that "Though St. John the Evangelist saw many strange monsters in his vision, he saw no creature so wild as one of his own commentators." I hope my students would tell you that I was not a "wild creature," but showed them that the book of Revelation provides guidance, encouragement and hope for disciples in every generation. Reporting on a teaching mission is somewhat difficult. There are no exciting pictures of a building going up or a well being dug. But, I teach in the hope that under the placid surface, exciting things are happening. One moment in particular stands out. After studying the letters to the seven churches at the beginning of the book of Revelation, I reminded the students that Jesus knows their churches well as he knew the churches in Revelation and that Jesus walks among and holds their churches. Then, I invited them to pray. In Ukrainian style, they rose to their feet and the classroom was filled with sound— first, the sound of chairs sliding back from tables and then the sound of heartfelt prayer. When the last "amen" had been spoken, Andrew turned to me and said, "Wow!" I am sure that God will use students who pray so earnestly to bless his church!

Classes ran from 8:00 am until 2:00 pm each day and there was opportunity to spend time with the students outside of the class. All of the students study English as part of their program and a couple of them were eager to practice with us, and help us learn a bit of Russian too! One evening Katha and I sat visiting with Igor who was in his second year at Odessa. We asked Igor why he had decided to study at Odessa and he warned us that it was a long story. "We've got time," Katha said and Igor told us his story.

Long after the dining room was empty we sat and listened as he made exacting use of his English vocabulary to share how God had brought him to faith and led him to seminary in the space of only a few months. It is his story to tell and not mine but, I will forever be grateful to him for having the courage it to share it with us.



Teaching at OTS. Interpreter Andrew is in the center of the picture. Andrew is in his third and final year at OTS.

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Near the end of the week, Katha and I celebrated our anniversary by going out for supper. By the time the waitress arrived at our table, word had apparently spread that she would be serving a couple that spoke neither Russian, nor Ukrainian and she was looking rather nervous. We tried English, German and my high school French. She responded to each attempt by giggling nervously and shaking her head. So we began saying every Ukrainian word we could think of, "perogy," "halopshi," "shashlik." Katha had studied Russian at school, but under the pressure of the moment the only word she could remember was "cat." We definitely didn't want that!



Visiting after a chapel service with Seminary President Vlad and Academic Dean Ted.

Later that evening the Seminary President, Vlad with the help of one of the professors, Slava— who acted as interpreter, invited us out for dessert. We had a wonderful time getting to know each other, sharing about our church and listening as he shared about the Seminary. I was sure to tell him that there are many Ukrainians in our church and in our community.

"Perhaps," Vlad said, "some of the Ukrainians in your church would like to join you the next time and reconnect with their Ukrainian roots." After such a wonderful experience I was glad to hear him speaking of "next time."

Submitted by Pastor Jon Pettinger,
Melville Baptist Church

Update on the October fall meeting.

On Saturday October 28, thirty-three pastors and delegates met at the Esterhazy Baptist Church. Pastor Robert moss opened our time together with a challenging devotional. Rev. Kendall Buhler was appointed to serve as secretary in the absence of Pastor Jonathan Pettinger, who was teaching in the Ukraine.

Rev. Eugene Speer resigned as Moderator having served the one year term that he agreed to serve in October of 2016. We would like to thank Rev. Speer for his service to the SBA over this past year. Our GSBC director, Luke Prybylski, presented a camp report. He highlighted the successful summer ministry that took place. We are excited to report 29 new Christians as a result of this summer's ministry. There was a large number returning staff this past summer which brings a level of stability for which we are very thankful. Plans are underway for the construction of a new dining hall.

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Update on the October fall meeting....continued from page 3

Pastor Stephen Luff, reported on the Youth Ministry of the SBA. He expressed thanks to the SBA and its churches for their continued support in providing funds to help with transportation to the Youth Gathering. This year there were 70 leaders and youth who attended the Youth gathering in Orange County. The delegates appointed a Nomination Committee which consists of Jocelyn Armbruster, Sheila Lang, and Eugene Speer.

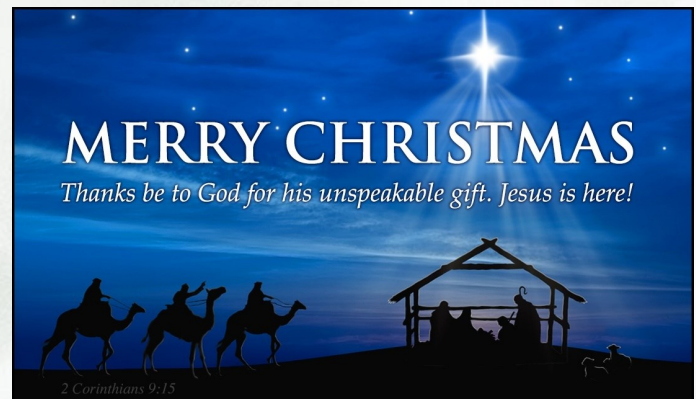
The treasurer Marianne Engel, presented the financial report as well as a proposed budget for 2018. Total income up to the end of September 2017 was \$85,047.06 with expenditures of \$100,043.45. The proposed 2018 budget, which was passed, is \$114,590.00 which represents a deficit budget of \$33,490.00.

There was a time of sharing of the ministries of the churches. It was an encouraging time and a reminder that God is at work in the SBA. We can be thankful as an Association for the faithfulness of God!

After a wonderful lunch provided by the ladies of the Esterhazy Church, a report and discussion on the Ends (high priorities) of the NAB was led by Regional Minister Ken Solberg. The four initiatives are: Facilitating Missional Ministries, Sending and Supporting Missionaries, Equipping Spiritual Leaders, and Engaging Ethnic and Cross-Cultural Ministries.

Rev. Doug Armbruster was nominated to serve as Acting Moderator until our Spring Meeting, February 9-11, 2018, which will be hosted by Ebenezer Baptist Church at Dallas Valley Ranch Camp.

~ Submitted by Regional Minister, Ken Solberg



COMING SOON



The SBA spring meetings, hosted by Ebenezer Baptist Church, will be held on February 9-11, 2018.

This will be held Dallas Valley Ranch Camp.