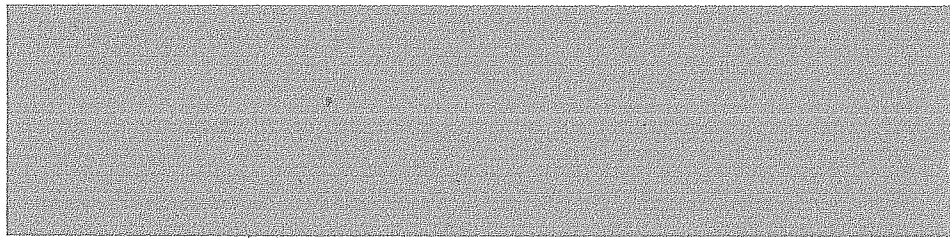


**WELS Lutherans for Life
In Ukraine**

Hope for a Nation



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I remember as a child pondering the hopelessness of people under the communist regime in what was formerly called the USSR. I learned about its history and saw it displayed in full (but perhaps overblown) color in movies such as "Firefox" and others. I remember contemplating sad pictures of people living behind the Iron Curtain, people just like me, but devastated. It seemed that each face portrayed a tragic picture of the dead end of hopelessness. These people seemed dead even while they lived.

But when Communism fell in that part of the world many folks believed that things would be different. They envisioned that each of the sad faces formerly tinted with red despair now would spring alive with hope. Life would change for them. Capitalism would make its way into these demoralized countries, perhaps even democracy would usher in a spring of bounty. These freed people would begin living again; their eyes would be opened to the goodness of the world and every picture of them would show more and more smiles each day.

But it was not to be.

Where hope was expected, it remained all too elusive. Things did not instantly improve; in fact, they seemed to get worse in many cases. Democracy and capitalism did not usher in prosperity, because governments supposedly free of communist rule ruled in the same way they always had. When folks looked at pictures of former Iron Curtain countries they still saw the tragic pictures of hopelessness. These people still had

nothing; their lives were going nowhere. As Jim and Jan Woods, a young couple very involved in WLfL work in Ukraine, put it:

It is hard to maintain hope when the much desired independence has at times made daily life harder for people. Overcoming the struggle to feed and clothe one's family can seem overwhelming when unemployment is so high. Even people who are employed are not necessarily getting paid. Many people who obtain salaries from the government (teachers, doctors, etc.) continue to work although they have not been paid for 4 or 5 months.

Hope was gone.

What was missing? Was it just the lack of earthly necessities or something greater? The author of this paper can make no comment on the politics of the matter. But it is apparent that *true hope* was missing among the people. What was it that Paul possessed which compelled him to write his joyful letter to the Phillippians while in prison? What was it that pulled David "out of the depths of woe"? It was true hope, the hope of the gospel. These men knew that Jesus Christ has suffered and died to pay for their sins. Through faith in this Jesus, God was their dear, loving Father who promised them the peace which is forgiveness and the hope which is heaven. These men could bear up under any affliction, spiritual or physical, because they had the true hope of the gospel. That is what these Iron Curtain people were missing. They had not formally had the gospel in decades; the church that did exist was forced underground by an atheistic government. For most the only answer to life, the only hope they could find in their dreary existence was viciously held far beyond their grasp.

To add horror into the mix from the Christian perspective was the dreadful reality that abortion was one well-traveled avenue of expressing this hopelessness. Without the hope or knowledge of God in their lives the sanctity of life was quickly lost. Amidst the hardships of life such as the lack of food, clothing and health care children became a

burden instead of a joy. Logically, therefore, they were killed off so as not to become unbearable burdens. They were eliminated without a trace by the thousands.

To a small group of Christians, the Ukrainian Lutheran Church, grasping tightly to the true hope this holocaust of children was heartbreaking and dreadful. They sought to slow down the onslaught so that they might have a chance to share their hope with those sad mothers and fathers. This way they might have an opportunity to save these children perhaps for eternity through baptism and God's Word.

Since they were inexperienced in this area, they sought help from a group well acquainted with these matters of abortion and the gospel of our God. That group was WELS Lutherans for Life (WLfL). This paper will seek to show how WELS Lutherans for Life became involved in this ministry and how God carefully maneuvered his guiding hand to direct these affairs for his glory. This paper will strive to show how WELS Lutherans for Life, through the power of God, has been able to help bring hope to a nation which needs hope so desperately.

Not Much Earthly Hope for Modern Ukraine

The Chernobyl Accident Affects Many

A Thoughts of Faith document states, "On April 26, 1986, the largest nuclear accident in history occurred at the Chernobyl nuclear facility in northern Ukraine." Radiation spread everywhere even dispersing its deadly fingers into the atmosphere. People all around the facility were bombarded with radiation. Many died then; many would die later. Worse yet, the disaster did not stop there, but the deadly fingers of

radiation worked their way into the unborn children and the genes of those who were there. This ^{led} lead to a great fear of severe birth defects from that same radiation.

As a result women who were pregnant at the time of the accident and exposed to the fallout were commanded by the Soviet government to have abortions. This was overseen by the police. If women didn't do it voluntarily, they were forced.¹

Today the fear continues since the birth defects caused by radiation are passed down from generation to generation primarily in the possibility for Down's Syndrome and Thyroid conditions. It is not possible to gauge how much ^{when awkward expression} affect the radiation still has upon the people, but it matters little. In the minds of the people radiation is still everywhere and doing terrible things. Perhaps this is not all of it, but the radiation most often gets the blame. Professor Schuetze, a pastor who is involved in the work of WLF in Ukraine and currently serves at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, says, "You have so many factors: you have poor nutrition; you have poor medicine; you have poor pre-natal care; you have a lot of alcoholism. And you put all of those factors together, yes, the radiation may be a contributing factor, but so often the Ukrainians blame their problems on that. They are almost to the point of being paranoid about the radiation." Jim and Jan Woods also write, "the psychological effect on the people is very real. People still fear the radiation and are concerned about any perceived increase in radiation in their environment (i.e. X-rays, computers)." However, Professor Schuetze makes it clear that there are undoubtedly many birth defects that can be traced back to the radiation.

¹ There is a woman in the church in Ternopil today who only escaped by fleeing through the woods and was able to save her child.

As a result many women feel compelled to abort their babies. After all those tiny lives may have birth defects as a result of the disaster. They don't want to subject their children to growing up like that, nor do they want to have to raise those kinds of children in that hopeless environment.

The Medical Clinic on Wheels Brings Some Earthly Hope

It was for this very reason that Ukrainian Christians felt they had to do something to stem the tide of abortion and help people with these birth defects. They were led by two driving forces: Dr. Steven Dudiak, a US doctor Ukrainian by birth, and Pastor Shep, of Thoughts of Faith, an Evangelical Lutheran Synod mission organization, which had begun ~~and was currently funded~~ the Ukrainian Lutheran Church mission. These children of God could not stand by as a hopeless tragedy took place while they possessed the hope of the gospel. Therefore a program called "The Medical Clinic on Wheels" was brought into Ukraine in 1992 by Thoughts of Faith as an answer to this idea that these children, many of whom would be physically deformed, needed to be aborted. The intent of the program was to provide loving medical care to the conditions of Ukrainian children so women could see that the Clinic was a place that could give their children medical care for physical difficulties and deformities if they were brought into the world. In addition, the Clinic would do what they could for other people in its reach whether they were affected by the Chernobyl accident or not.

The two mobile clinics which would make up "The Medical Clinic on Wheels" were manufactured in Cincinnati, Ohio late in 1991 and shipped to Ukraine. On April 10, 1992 they were brought to Ternopil accompanied by over one hundred tons of medical and charitable items purchased with funds from Thoughts of Faith. Much needed

equipment and donations were given by several corporations, hospitals, and charitable organizations. The entire staff for the clinics (doctors, nurses, technical and office staff) was Ukrainian. Ternopil was chosen because the great numbers of people who suffered from the Chernobyl accident had been transplanted there. It was a sure bet that these people needed medical attention most of all; and there would be many others whom The Clinic could help as well.

As a result of the radiation problems, their concentration was ⁺Thyroid and birth defects. They also provided medical and dental care with the modern equipment which had been given them. It was soon seen that their setup had made them probably the best provider of health care in Ukraine. Simple care up to very complex was done by these clinics.

The Abortion Situation in Ukraine Becomes More Evident.

Abortion was a dilemma prior to the Chernobyl accident which was not the only contributing factor to the large number of unborn children being killed. The problem was fostered, ultimately, by a lack of spiritual influence. The women who were tragically affected by the Chernobyl accident needed it desperately. All the other women and men of Ukraine needed it desperately as well. But since Ukraine was under communist control at the time of the accident and until it became independent in 1991, they did not get it as a rule. In fact, formal Christianity had been gone for so long that it was as Phil Hackbarth, Foreign Ministries Director for WELS Lutherans for Life, says that religion was, "not a major idea in Ukraine and as such they did not have a thorough knowledge of God's will as it relates to his sanctity and the regard for life." There was an official "religion" under Communist rule, but the clergy members were a part of the

government. These priests basically served as informants for the government. As a rule, then, only the elderly would go to church because they had nothing to lose. On the other hand, younger people who any interest in living and thriving under the communist system wouldn't be found in church since the priests might notice them and report them as part of their "religious" duties. Because these leaders are still a part of the communist system, which is still the governing power in spite of independence, there is a lot of mistrust ^{among} from the people. They do not, as a rule, seek the spiritual advice of their priests, and the priests, for their part, have not tried to be deterrents to abortion either. It is not difficult to see how the truth could be lost. People don't really see anything wrong with abortion since they have never been told otherwise. Professor Schuetze speaks about this mindset in Ukraine: "It is an amoral issue. It is simply like getting your tonsils out or having your appendix out. To them it's not a matter of 'is this right or wrong'; it's just something you do." The people are told that the life inside of them is nothing at least until six months, and then it's not very much at all. It is no wonder, then, that abortion seems to be a hopeful alternative to raising a child which was physically deformed by disaster or other health factors. "Since it's not wrong, why not do it and save yourself from a life of trouble?"

The next step is just a logical one for the sinful mind. Since education about life in the womb and alternative birth control measures is missing, as a rule, abortion simply seems like the way to practice birth control. It was and is still today the main form of birth control in Ukraine as is in many of the Eastern block countries. Without an apparent hint of conscience children are being hopelessly killed each and every day.

To make matters worse, most of the population of Ukraine is *very* poor. Even if women want to keep their children many do not feel that they can provide for those children. And it is not simply a matter of “can I give this child a good life” but “can I keep this child alive if I have it?” It is not about stylish clothes but any clothes at all. It is not about rich foods, but any food at all. Since they do not know God’s will about life, poverty clouds their minds terribly. Compound this with the fear of birth defects brought about by the terrible Chernobyl accident and you have a proper formula for the horrifying holocaust of unborn children which is taking place today.

The Ukrainian health system does not offer any help. It is so disorganized and poorly supplied that these destitute people are required to provide some of the medical instruments and medicines themselves to receive health care! It is no wonder that there is such a terrible health crisis in Ukraine. As Doctor Stephen Dudiak commented in a document dated May 10, 1992: “Health conditions in Ukraine are considerably worse than I expected. Fifty-three percent of all school children suffer from poor health. There appears to be an alarming deterioration of public health, including rapidly rising rates of cancer and respiratory diseases, due to sever air pollution. Infant mortality is worse than in Africa. Dental care is poor or non-existent.” Again families do not feel that they could provide for a child in such a situation. Jim and Jan Woods have some interesting insights regarding this. They write:

The health care system in Ukraine has suffered greatly from the changes which came along with independence. We have had the opportunity to speak with a number of doctors and all agree that they were able to provide much better care under the Soviet system. Health care is still socialized and care in hospitals and polyclinics (outpatient centers) is provided free. However, the hospitals can't afford to buy equipment and medication. Thus, they inform patients of everything they will need for treatment (IV's, antibiotics, sutures, syringes, etc.) and the patient must go buy these items before being admitted to the hospital. Most hospitals don't even have adequate food supplies, so families bring meals in for their loved ones. Preventative health care appears rare but

there is a public health system in place. There are private dental centers opening and the care is more technologically advanced than in the public dental hospitals. However, few people can afford such care.

Therefore they continue: "We feel the health care needs are so large that whether or not they are caused by Chernobyl is secondary. Poor nutrition has led to widespread anemia problems and lack of treatment (due to lack of money for supplies) has led to more serious problems that may have been prevented if promptly treated." These women see no other choice than to kill their babies before birth rather than watching them die (as they suppose must happen without medical aid).

That all of these factors (the Chernobyl accident, lack of spiritual guidance, poverty and poor health care) are contributing to a terrible holocaust of babies is evident in the numbers. The average woman living in Ukraine today has 8 abortions. Natalia

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Kuziv, one of the Ukrainian counselors, reports about women who have had up to 15 abortions. It is estimated that 5 out of 6 children are aborted. These astronomical numbers are evidence of the reality that the Ukrainian nation as a whole has become callused to the sinfulness of abortion and are intent on doing away with their precious children as suits them.

WELS Lutherans For Life is Asked to Help Bring Hope

Ukrainian Lutherans For Life Sparks Hope

In light of this and in addition to The Mobile Clinic The Ukrainian Lutheran Church sought to begin more work in Ukraine. It was their godly desire to stem the tide of aborted children and to share the hope of the gospel with these women and their children. The unborn children needed hope; the hopeless mothers of the unborn children

needed hope. The Post Abortion Syndrome victims, tormented by their sins of abortion, needed hope. And that hope could only be found if these women were touched with the sweet message of the gospel.

Therefore the church established what would later be called Ukrainians Lutherans for Life in order to provide Christian pro-life counseling in some form. This organization attempted to deter women from aborting their children by turning them into God's Word to see what he has to say about the sanctity of life and the forgiveness of sins.

To accomplish this goal Slavic Horpynchuk, a member of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church, and others proposed that some members of the church be trained to give seminars and classes on the truths about abortion in light of God's Word to high schools and other educational organizations. Many were behind this because it would give them a chance to share their faith in a very public way and would serve as a marvelous outreach tool for the church. As God directed it, this would work marvelously as public institutions, schools, universities, even hospitals would allow these speakers to share the wonders of God and the reality of abortion.

WELS Lutherans For Life is Asked to Help Fan This Spark of Hope

About this time WELS Lutherans for Life was asked to come to Ukraine and give some guidance with The Mobile Clinic on Wheels, since it was seeking to involve life-issues as a lead-in to gospel outreach. There were even some ideas of management of the clinics by WLfL tossed around at the time. So Lutherans for Life assessed the situation in Ukraine and the possibility to enter in some respect of life work. Immediately WLfL recognized, as Phil Hackbarth put it, "...we certainly don't want to limit ourselves geographically while we carry ^{out} our ministry." So WELS Lutherans for

Life accepted the challenge. Thus began the first real formal effort of WLfL outside of United States.

Ann Warner, Brad Mattes and John and Joan Snamiska (John was on the WLfL foreign ministries committee) made the initial trip in September of 1994 after a lot of delays following their original commission to go in 1992. Ann says, "I felt like I was blessed to be one of the spies going into the Promised Land, because we came back with all these wonderful reports...and how hungry they were [for the gospel]." She was right. In Ukraine they found a flourishing church, functioning clinics, Christians eager to do the Lord's work and many hopeless people looking for hope.

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As they spent time in Ukraine with the church, WLfL was not sure what its involvement with the clinics would be. As the clinics were toured, the visitors offered suggestions for improvement. However it became evident that within Thoughts of Faith there were really two different structures involving the Medical Clinic: one that oversaw the clinics and one that managed the church affairs. These had become separate organizations. As a result the clinics became merely a social effort; gospel outreach was not a major part of the process or the outlook. This did not fit very well into the goals which WLfL saw as part of its existence. In consequence, nothing really developed with the clinics until 1996.

Instead WLfL saw itself fitting much better into the life-issues outreach which was developing in the Ukrainian Lutherans for Life; the main thrust of WLfL has always been gospel outreach through life issues presented in a counseling or educational format.

The concept of Ukrainian presenters speaking at institutions seemed to perfectly fit that thrust. Abortion issues served as a perfect 'point of contact' with the Ukrainian people since abortion seemed to be such a major part of their lives. WLfL believed this program would be a nice marriage with the WLfL ministry since it fell right into their nature and philosophy. ^{purpose?}

As a result the WELS representatives trained two people in Ternopil and two in Kiev to go out and give life presentations. They did this, in part, by example as they made the presentations themselves. Here they began to see "how hungry [the Ukrainians] were for the gospel" as Ann had put it. For example, Ann and those with her made their presentation at a grade school. When they walked out of a classroom, after just one presentation, a teacher approached them and asked them to come to another class. Another came after that. It went on like that until they had missed lunch. As they were finally leaving a teacher from the local university stopped them. She was on her way to a lecture and asked the presenters to come with her. The presenters asked what they were going to hear at this lecture, and the teacher responded, "No, no, no. *You* are going to lecture." Brad spoke about abortion and the newer development of partial-birth abortions. Ann turned to the Bible and addressed God's universal word for all nationalities, sharing the law and gospel with them. The teacher sat sternly throughout the presentation, but afterward thanked the presenters profusely and asked them to come back and speak more on the subject. The presenters were sure to tell all that if they had aborted a child, there were people to whom they could speak at the Ukrainian Lutheran Church (The germ of an idea was being planted for full time life center work). It was apparent that the fields were ripe and many were willing to listen to

the message. Ann and Brad returned to the US with glowing reports of what was happening in Ukraine.

As a result Professor Schuetze and his wife, Paul Snamiska and his wife went to Ukraine again in the spring of 1995. This time they were allowed to do some more presentations, one of which was at the maternity hospital on Good Friday. What an occasion for these Americans, thousands of miles from home in a foreign land, to share the universal hope of our Savior's death on the cross. What a joy it must have been for them!

It was still the idea that WLfL was training the Ukrainian counselors how to do these presentations. This was done, in part, by example again but even more intensely than it had been before. The visitors brought over fetal models, slides, brochures on abortion, seminar material on PAS, etc. and showed the Ukrainian presenters how WLfL did presentations in the United States.

As this went on for the second time many questions were formulated. Wasn't there something more that could be done? What was WLfL trying to accomplish in Ukraine? What was their role now? In the future? Where was Ukrainian Lutherans for Life going? Were public presentations enough? Could they do more? Could WELS LfL help them expand? WLfL leaders devoted a large segment of time in board meetings to sift through the possibilities. Communication began pouring in from Ukraine and the ideas were growing. Eventually they had it: the life centers had worked very well in the United States; couldn't this concept be contextualized and used in Ukraine? Thus the life center idea developed and was eventually put into effect.

With this idea came the proposal for management by WLfL from Thoughts of Faith as it had been tossed around concerning the clinics. Indeed, WLfL had the background and expertise in the area of life issues from birth all the way until death. They were able to provide structure for a counseling-center-type organization in addition to assistance with the ministry involving presentations about abortion. They would also be in a great position to carry out humanitarian work through sources in the United States. The desire was there; the field was ripe for the harvest; God was working with his mighty hand. And so it came to be.

WELS Lutherans for Life Begins a Management for Hope

Goals to Bring Hope

Following the decision for management, WLfL helped begin and assumed management for two centers: one in Kiev and the other in Ternopil (Remember that this was the relocation site for Chernobyl victims which made it a very obvious location in which to place a center). They brought the counselors over to America for training, providing them with manuals and brochures, fetal models and all the materials they needed to carry out their ministry in an organized fashion.

WLfL immediately established a focus so that the goal of their work, gospel outreach, would not be lost. Thus their General Philosophy Statement was this:

A pro-life ministry in and of itself is not an end but a means to an end. While saving unborn lives from abortion reflects obedience to God's command to love others it does not satisfy the eternal problem of sin. For that reason WELS Lutherans for Life advocates a pro-life ministry that serves as a platform and catalyst for witnessing God's Word about sin and grace. Consistent with this philosophy we abide by the following tenets:

- The greatest danger facing any human being, born or unborn, is sin.
- The only deliverance from this danger is faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior.

- Faith is instilled by the Holy Spirit through the tool of God's Word.
- Christians are to be messengers of God's Word to all people.
- Christians are to reflect God's sacrificial love in seeking to protect all human lives, born and unborn.

Simply put, the idea was that Ukrainian Lutherans for Life would use life issues to

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provide a point of contact for the gospel with people. It would, in theory, "Provide a bridge into the fellowship of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church and its local congregation(s)...it is intended to provide an opportunity

and path for a person unfamiliar with Lutheranism to be exposed to its teachings. Through a multi-faceted program conducted at the Christian Life Center the Ukrainian Lutheran Church will be able to use life issues and other matters as platforms to witness with God's Word (This is from page one of a document of proposals worked up by LfL)." Phil Hackbarth put into his own words: "It's the reason that we're there, to share the gospel, to serve as a bridge into the church. We can take people that perhaps haven't heard about Jesus, use our counseling effort, use our educational efforts, and use our humanitarian aid as an indirect way to expose them to Jesus and bring them into God's family of believers."

In addition to these principles, the goal was not to replace or precede the Ukrainian Lutheran churches but to supplement them. Therefore WLfL adopted the policy that the life centers would flow out of the church rather than the church out of them. Today once a presence is established then WLfL uses the centers as a bridge to the church, "as an opportunity to feed the church." The primary role is to complement to the church, not *vica versa*.

In accord with this, therefore, WLfL wanted the main spiritual support to come from the Ukrainian Lutheran Church. They wanted a serving role beneath the church, so that the counselors would view their work as an outreach tool of their church, that they were a part of their church. WLfL wanted them to maintain their identity with their church in Ukraine rather than becoming to attached to WLfL in America.

The Work of Hope

The means by which Ukrainian Lutherans For Life carries out these goals listed above are primarily counseling, humanitarian and educational work in connection with the counseling centers.

The most intense aspect of this work is, as in the United States, counseling. Since the counseling center concept had worked in the United States, a similar form was adopted for Ukraine. Christian pro-life counseling is used so that men and women might become exposed to God's Word on a one-to-one basis as an opportunity to lead them into the church. There they can receive spiritual nourishment and also the fellowship that they need in their difficult times. Then, with the help of God, the women will decide to keep their babies

As a great bonus Ukrainian Lutherans for Life is extremely blessed to have a working relationship with the maternity hospitals in Kiev, Ternopil and Sevistopol (the newest center). In every case, it is a wonderful opportunity. When women come to have an abortion they are required to speak with one of the counselors as part of the procedure. Natalia Kuziv is able to meet with six to eight women each day and usually works at the hospitals three times a week depending on the number of women coming in for abortions. She is allowed to openly share with them the truths about abortion and

the hope of the gospel! That is something of which we would never dream in the United States!

Now WLfL is trying to intensify the work in these places, especially in Ternopil, since it is a little late to begin counseling these women when they are already at the hospital and have made up their minds to obtain abortions. (Even though it is late, it is often very effective and God certainly uses it to serve his purposes.) Therefore Ukrainian Lutherans for Life is trying to move their initial point of contact to the beginning of the pregnancy of a woman considering an abortion.

In addition to this early counseling the counselors are beginning to see a great need for Post Abortion Syndrome counseling. There are countless women who have had many abortions; now they need the comfort of the gospel as their conscience smashes them with the reality of sin and its consequences. It is likely that this effort will increase immensely as the truth about abortion is spread among the people.

Humanitarian work is also a means by which the Ukrainian Lutherans for Life carries out its goal of sharing the gospel through life issues. As was mentioned above the Ukrainian people are very poor. Besides possibilities of birth defects, many women have abortions because they are financially incapable of taking care of these children. With humanitarian aid WLfL can assure these women that they will help them with the things they need if they keep their children. This way they can open up a door and use their aid as a point of contact by which they can touch lives with the hope of the gospel. "This is a part of the work that sometimes we are hesitant to do", says Professor John Schuetze. There's always the fear of social gospel crowding out the truth of sin and

grace. But we can't overlook the need that the Lord presents before us to help the helpless and the possibility that this need filled will give us a chance to witness our faith.

Currently WLF sends over several-ton shipments (the last shipment was about eleven tons!) of humanitarian aid every three to four months. Medical supplies, even over-the-counter material about which we do not think (Phil's example was decongestant for the runny nose) and personal items, even seeds for gardens are gathered to send over. These supplies are provided by people all over the country: Primarily clothing but also toiletries and medicine, blankets, baby cribs, strollers, etc. The materials are gathered at a warehouse facility in Waukegan, Wisconsin where everything is inspected to make sure it is in excellent condition, no tears or stains or flaws. Remember that this humanitarian aid is not given only as assistance but as a way to bridge the gospel. WLF does not want to spoil a great message with shoddy work. "We hesitate to have these women come in for counseling where they can hear about their perfect and loving Savior and then complement that by saying, 'now here's a blanket that's torn or stained.' We want the item...to complement the message...We want to demonstrate how perfect and loving [Jesus] is by giving them something that's in very good condition rather than something that might damage the impact of the message." Then the supplies are sorted carefully and inventoried so the contents of every box are exactly marked on the outside. This is not done only for organizational reasons but also for customs in Ukraine which is very suspicious of anything coming into the country since it is suspected that it will be sold on the black market. This work of preparing supplies for shipment is done almost entirely by volunteers; only one person is on staff and that is the person overseeing the whole affair. Material is gathered by requests in publications of

WELS and ELS churches or by clothing drives run by the branches. One example of this is the WLfL Christmas drive last year called Christmas in Ukraine, asking for people to give out of thanks for the life that they have been given by their heavenly Father through Jesus Christ. The response was fantastic! The hope of the gospel moved these people to share of what they had for others who need it desperately. Their donations will be used to serve as a bridge for the gospel.

Along the lines of Humanitarian work is the adoption issue which had not developed much in the past. The hope is that WELS families in the United States could be given the opportunity to adopt children whose mothers decide to keep them but feel incapable of raising them due to financial and/or health restraints. This would be a wonderful aid for counseling efforts, because counselors could say, "If you keep your child, even if you can't take care of him/her we can provide parents in the United States." This had been almost impossible up until now. However, just recently the government, which had previously been very opposed to this idea, has been lightening up on the red tape and everything involved in adoption out of the country. WLfL is ready to seize the opportunity should things develop further.

Educational work is yet another way by which the Ukrainian Lutherans for Life carries out its goal of sharing the gospel through life issues. This is primarily carried out through the counseling efforts. However, The centers do provide group classes. The new center in Sevastopol is a good example. There counselors are not only allowed into the Maternity hospital on a counseling basis but they are also allowed to use classroom settings for giving lectures about abortion to women. In addition their classes educate women on caring for a child, breastfeeding, and the changes in the body of a pregnant

woman all in the sphere of God's plan for mankind. It is amazing that the hospitals allow counselors to bring in the gospel and the Christian perspective on life issues even though ~~it~~ they are public places.

The counselors also speak to other Ukrainian institutions on life issues. They have been tremendously blessed that they have been allowed to speak in many of the educational facilities, especially those that have a medical focus. Several ob/gyn classes have invited the counselors to speak about the development of children in the womb. They are even allowed to witness about Jesus during the course of their talks on this subject. What an incredible blessing from our God!

What the workers have discovered is that most people have never been educated about the truths of human life in the womb. As was said above, abortion has become an amoral issue. People do not understand that it is a sin. When they are enlightened with pictures and fetal models the law hits many hard with the terrible reality that abortion is murder and angers our God. Then the workers are able to bring in the sweet gospel which gives these people the true hope of the forgiveness of sins!

In addition to the educational speaking there has been a lot of translation of materials in progress. Since Jim and Jan Woods have been in Ukraine, they have been able to find local publishers who can translate pamphlets, Bible portions, etc. that WLF has here in America and lay them out nicely for presentation in a professional format. The counselors can then distribute these to everyone who is interested in finding out more information on what God has to say about life.

Since ~~this~~ all this work (counseling, humanitarian and educational) is done as a bridge to the church through the gospel, follow-up is a very important part of the

ministry. A lot of this work is done, not only by the counselors, but by the pastoral staff of the Ukrainian Lutheran churches. They follow up on counseled women with presentations of God's Word, law and gospel. It is really a pleasure, says Phil, to see these women who have decided to keep their babies often become members of and very active in the church. Those who have not been baptized are baptized; and their babies are baptized! All this work is co-mingled with friendly, Christian support and further counseling.

A lot of this follow-up is carried out via the humanitarian aid which gives occasion for these contacts with the gospel. This is given to those women who kept their babies and need physical assistance. Then with the physical help comes the spiritual help.

Same Work of Hope, Different Situations

The three centers (Kiev, Ternopil, Sevastopol) that currently represent Ukrainian Lutherans for Life proclaim the same message of hope, but they all have very different situations in which to do that.

Kiev is the big city, much more westernized than Ternopil or Sevastopol. It remains about eighty percent Russian speaking today, although Ukrainian tradition is still very strong there. Since Kiev is a highly respected area of education much of the counseling work is done with groups of women at educational institutions. Work is even done on a higher level with gatherings of medical professionals as was mentioned above.

Ternopil is much more traditional Ukrainian than the other two cities. Furthermore, even though it is inhabited by a quarter of a million people it still retains the small town atmosphere, Professor Schuetze says. In light of that, counseling is done

primarily with women on a one-to-one basis either at the center or in the maternity ward at the hospital in which they have been allowed by the director to have two offices. The work is very intense since Ternopil is where the Chernobyl accident victims were relocated. The threat of radiation and birth defects is often on the minds of people as though it were an eternal cloud of death and doom hanging over them.

The center at Sevastopol recently opened in February of 1997. It is the most noticeably different from the other two centers. Since Sevastopol is on the Crimean Sea, there are several Russian naval bases in the area. Therefore, much of the counseling, especially group counseling, is done by a man named Volodymyr since a large portion of the audiences are men in the navy. As in America, when a woman decides to have an abortion, much of the decision to do so lies upon the child's father who is required to grant his consent. Oftentimes when a sailor sees that his partner is pregnant he will perceive that as an infringement upon his career in the navy. Therefore he will try to convince the woman to have an abortion. Volodymyr counsels these sailors so that they might hear God's hope-filled Word on life and turn from their decision to abort the babies.

As different as these three situations are, the counselors all face similar hardships. One can just imagine how intense this work must be, how it must emotionally drain the counselors. In spite of the victories there are many defeats, and every victory is a vicious struggle. Professor Schuetze says that from the reports it is perhaps one out of three or four women that decides not to go through with the abortion after receiving counseling; As a result, there is always going to be disappointment and stress for the counselors working so hard to save these lives. We must remember to keep them in our prayers at

all times! These counselors also need all the encouragement they can get, encouragement filled with the power of the gospel which moves us all in the most amazing ways. Here in America WLfL counselors have a support system. They have a national office and large churches to which they can turn for help in tough cases or emotional stress. The Ukrainian counselors have very little of that.

One sad twist which adds to the hardship is that Planned Parenthood has just recently entered Ukraine. Professor Schuetze says it was inevitable that they would go over there wielding their money. To make matters worse, now they are also working in the maternity hospital. This presents a tough situation for the life-centers. They want to retain their foothold in the hospitals so that the truth can continue to be spread. That is why WLfL constantly sends supplies to the maternity hospitals as part of the humanitarian aid. First, it is part of our duty as Christians to give to the needs of the helpless. Second, it helps WLfL keep their foot in the door so they can witness the gospel and continue this work; as long as WLfL is providing needed things it will be very difficult for the hospital to get rid of them. "It's not like a bribe", Professor Schuetze explains, "it's simply being shrewd where Jesus says, 'be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.'" There is a lot of "you scratch my back, I'll scratch your back" mentality in a country that has been under communist rule for so long.

More Hope in the Clinics

In spring of 1996 Professor Schuetze went to Ukraine again, and WLfL again was asked to take over management for the clinics in a way similar to the management of the centers. As was mentioned above this had been the original impetus behind the initial visit of LfL representatives. However until the spring of 1996 it had not been formally

acted upon while the centers were developing. Now it was evident that the clinics had not been doing all of their work as was originally intended. The original idea was that while providing health care, these clinics could also heal souls with the hope of the gospel. In point of fact, the people were getting health care for their children, but gospel outreach was not being carried out. The Mobile Clinic really had become exclusively a humanitarian effort of the church and was not serving to supplement their ultimate work. The goal behind WLfL management was to join the two halves of organization in the clinics, church and management, so that health care could be tied in with gospel outreach.

Jesus is our Great Physician and he heals our spiritual wounds. We hope to share physical and spiritual healing with those who come to the Medical Clinics on Wheels.

In June of 1996 WLfL agreed to formally take over management of the Medical Clinic on Wheels. In the early part of this year, 1997, Jim and Jan Woods were sent to Ukraine by LfL to direct and coordinate the management efforts. In writing to the author they shared a little of what

they do there now:

...Lutherans for Life has hired us to provide on site management of the MCOW activities...we have been working closely with the office manager and clinic coordinators to ensure the clinics run smoothly. We are working with the clinic coordinators (a doctor and a dentist) to make plans for the clinics to travel to outlying towns and villages to provide medical care to children. This involves quite a bit of coordination with officials and doctors in the area they will visit. Our doctors stay in the village during the week and return to their families here in Ternopil on the weekends. Thus, we must ensure they have proper room and board. Schools in the area will work together to bring children in shifts to the clinics. We also must ensure proper electricity and water are available which is not always an easy task in areas where shortages are common. The medical clinics have very dedicated and competent Ukrainian staff and we see our role as encouraging them and providing them the resources they need to serve children well. Our main goal is to ensure that everyone who comes to the clinics knows that they exist to mirror Christ's love. Jesus is our Great Physician and he heals our spiritual wounds. We hope to share physical and spiritual healing with those who come to the Medical Clinics on Wheels.

This last statement of the dedicated couple really serves to sum up what WLfL is trying to accomplish with the Medical Clinic. As with the centers they are not there just to save people physically. If they were what would be the point, ultimately? Their bodies would be whole, but their souls would be lost. They would be left spiritually destitute, without hope, the true hope of the gospel. WLfL, through the Woods, is attempting to carry out the task for which they exist, as Ann Warner told the author was the motto of her chapter of WLfL: "Saving lives now, and for eternity!"

This spiritual work previous to WLfL management had already been seen in the clinics but only informally. Jim and Jan report about that and then follow up with their goal to expand gospel outreach to be a intrigal part of the clinic's ministry:

We believe the gospel outreach possibilities for the MCOW have just begun to be realized. Last year the clinics were taken to a town called Sevastopol. At that time, there was a small group of Christians meeting together and requesting instruction. The clinics spent 2 months in this town and made it known that they were there as an outpouring of Christian love from the Lutheran church. This developed so much interest that the small group began to grow rapidly. Today, Sevastopol has a registered Lutheran church and a seminary student travels to this town to have services once each month. They have over 100 people in attendance on these Sundays and active catechism classes. We had the joy of being with this young congregation last week for their first Holy Communion. We are hoping the clinics can increase their gospel outreach. We hope to coordinate with the seminary here in Ternopil and make Christian materials available to everyone who visits the clinics."

Presently, the Woods are enhancing the efforts of the medical clinic on wheels. They are involving the Seminary students in Ternopil, who come on sight and do outreach work. They hand out tracts concerning the teachings of the Lutheran Church and explain them. They are also involved in one-on-one witnessing. As people come with their physical needs they are able to leave having had their spiritual needs also addressed. With God's help the witness of those at the clinics will open the hearts of the people there with the beautiful hope found in the gospel.

As WLfL expects growth at the clinics so they are seeing the growth already in progress all throughout the Ukrainian ministry. And everyone is eager to expand the work. However, there are fiscal restraints at this time. The WLfL budget sets limited growth and WLfL is not able to answer every call for help right away. The desire is there, but care must be taken and good stewardship practiced. There could be immense growth in a very short time, but perhaps some of the effectiveness of management would be lost. So things are progressing well but cautiously.

In all of this it is clear that God has been closely involved, carefully arranging things with his mighty hand for the good of his people. He has turned the terrible tragedy of the Chernobyl disaster into glory for his name both in the centers and the clinics. He has answered the long-lasting power of communism with the powerful hope of his gospel spread through these counselors and other workers. He has overcome the distances and differences to bring Christians, one in faith, together to battle the work of the devil and save souls for him. Thank the Lord for the work that he is doing in Ukraine. What a marvelous God of hope we have!

Afterword of Hope

Phil Hackbarth had several great comments that summed up the work of WELS Lutherans for Life in Ukraine nicely. Here is a sample of them. "Not only have pregnant mothers been exposed to the gospel message and grown and come to know about Jesus as the Savior of their sins and of sins of the child that is within them, [but] our own counselors over there have grown tremendously." Phil also related:

What I think is so unique is how God can use anything to serve to his glory. The Chernobyl disaster was a terrible, terrible thing, but the Church has benefited tremendously from the ministry efforts that have grown out of that terrible disaster. Churches are sprouting up all over Ukraine as a result of the medical clinics on wheel's

influence serving as a bridge into the Church. Ukrainians Lutherans for Life [is] serving as a bridge into the church. And those two entities came as a result of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. God has used even that to benefit his kingdom and hallow his name.

Professor Schuetze also had great things to say about the work:

I don't think we would have ever guessed that we would be involved in the program that we are now when it first came up to the board. There were a lot of tough discussions because we just weren't sure where this was going to go initially. And it just seemed like every time we took a step forward we took two steps backwards...All you can say is 'the Lord did it.'

Ann Warner also says:

It just opened my eyes to the world...the same God is here and the same God is there. And at times when I am down, I shouldn't even feel down, because: look at them over there; they don't have anything and look what they're doing!...They go out in the middle of their malls and they can stand there and tell people about the Savior; they can tell people about life, about abortions, what God says. They can do that! And people can stand in the cold and listen.

Jim and Jan Woods write: "It is our prayer that God will continue to advance His church and, if it is His will, use the clinics. We are also very aware that just a few short years ago we wouldn't have been welcome in this country at all. God pulling down the Iron Curtain is a true display of His power so that His people may worship him in spirit and truth."

The Christians Involved in This Ministry of Hope

Phil Hackbarth, whom the author interviewed March 31, 1997 is the Foreign ministries director for WELS Lutherans for Life. The scope of his ministry not limited to Ukraine but does receive the most attention

Professor John Schuetze whom the author interviewed April 2, 1997 was at the time this effort started the spiritual advisor on the National Board for WELS Lutherans for Life. Thoughts of Faith requested that Lutherans for Life be involved in their mission work, to use life issues as an outreach tool. As the program developed Professor

Schuetze was asked to be part of the team that went over to Ukraine the second time. From this group they developed the foreign ministry team of which he served as chairman. Now Phil Hackbarth is more the leader of this group and the team is advisory. Professor Schuetze just recently accepted a call to the Seminary as a professor.

Ann Warner whom the author interviewed December 22, 1996 has been a counselor for Lutherans for Life for twelve and a half years. About seven years ago, the LfL national asked her to attend seminars in the Chicago area regarding Post Abortion Syndrome (PAS). Up until that point she had only read a short paragraph about PAS in a book. At these seminars she was educated, in a large part, by women who had aborted their children and now were talking about it. Pastor Fleischmann and the national board asked her to go over to Ukraine since she had seen many people in her counseling and was involved with this research into PAS.

Jim and Jan Woods who replied to an interview recently sent to them by E-mail in Ukraine have lived in Ukraine for about three months now. They were hired by WLfL late in 1996 to be leaders in the management responsibilities for WLfL in Ukraine. They had previously been very involved with their counseling center in Ohio.

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