

FAITH PARTNERSHIP

Trip Special - June 2009

Just got back from a 12-day trip with Greg Swinamer. We visited 4 different countries, staying in 7 different places - good job I'm an expert packer! So, here's my 'trip report'. Overleaf you can read some more personal thoughts about my travels.

Sun 24 May: Flew to **Kiev** (Ukraine). Been up since 01.30, but Greg had promised Igor Stepchuk we'd be at his 3pm church service! Did a tag-team preach with Greg. In the evening Igor drove us 80km to **Kagharlyk** to meet Wayne Zschech, an incredible visionary Pastor working to see the town transformed spiritually & socially. Discussed some potential business partnerships.

Mon: Back to **Kiev**. Met ALTC trainers & staff from Christian Life Assembly (CAN) for flight to Crimea. The 3 trainers for the LD Conference were Jeff Brunton, Derek Smith (UK) & Phil Cann (CAN). Jeff & Life Church Burnley are spearheading NLI's LD conferences in Crimea & CLA is doing the same in Church Planting. Drove to the ALTC venue in **Stereagooshye** on the north coast of Crimea, overlooking the Black Sea. The venue, a recently renovated Butlins-style camp, was right on the beach, with a pool, recreation & conference facilities. Perfect for the ALTC. Even the food was pretty good.



Tues - Fri (ALTC) NLI LD conferences involve practical teaching, small group discussion & corporate feedback sessions. (Top photo shows Phil in action with a helping hand from Jeff!) In the evening we have worship, preaching (trainers choice) & prayer ministry. During the 4 days there is also time for delegates & trainers to relax & build relationships. The conference was a resounding success. I was certainly challenged by the teaching. The NLI initiative in Crimea will last at least 3yrs, so you'll be hearing more news & testimonies in the coming months.



Fri - Sat: Friday pm: drove to **Armiansk** area (N. Crimea) to visit some local church plants. It's humbling to meet men & women who are faithfully ministering in some very tough places. We met some ex-drug addicts who, having been through rehab, (a ministry of the mother church in Armiansk) are now reaching out to people in surrounding villages. Unemployment & financial hardship is huge. The need for some 'Good News' is immense, especially with the rise of Islam amongst Crimean Tatars. In the last 5yrs more than 200 mosques have been built in the region.

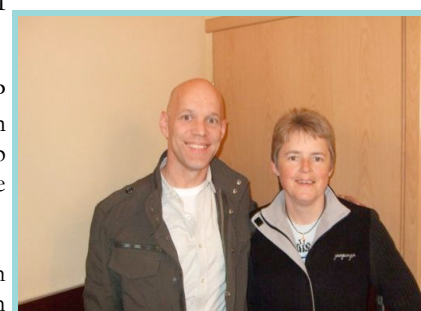
Sun: Simferopol. Visited 2 very different churches: a 400-strong 'Hillsong' style church that meets in a concert hall & a newly-launched church plant full of 'baby' Christians who have just completed the Alpha course. Again we did tag-team preaching (2nd photo). The church meet in a chiropractic business set up as an outreach. Have you ever had a massage after the church service? I did! Late evening flight back to **Kiev**.



Mon 1 Jun: After a more relaxed a.m. in Kiev we flew back to **Vienna** & caught the train (well, several) to **Ostrava** (Czech R)! You can read more about our train adventures overleaf.

Tues 2: Met with NLI project staff in Ostrava. Had a very profitable time with Radim (STM teams/Admin) & Bohuslav (Director) before catching another train or two into Poland.

Wed - Thur: The final leg of the tour saw us in **Radomsko** to meet with 20+ pastors at a CP summit (3rd photo). The initiative is being led by Ps Steve Wyndham, (Melbourne/AUS) in partnership with NLI. The aim being to look at more effective ways to plant churches & equip leaders in Poland, where Catholicism still has such a strong hold. In a relaxed environment we discussed CP models, challenges, & potential solutions.



Finally... An unexpected blessing of the trip was meeting John Prince (right), travelling with Steve Wyndham. Although John has lived in Australia for the last 27yrs he's originally from Rossendale (Lancs/UK). Turns out we went to the same school. He was in the same year as my brother & remembers him well. As you can imagine, we had a right good reminisce! Small world eh! After turning his back on God many years ago, he started running in the right direction last year & now his whole family go to church. Fantastic testimony.

SOME PERSONAL THOUGHTS

I love inspiring you with news & testimonies about my work with NLI. I'm very blessed to be engaged in this ministry, but have to admit that at times travelling can be very intense. I've done a couple of long multi-trips before, it makes sense to combine several events in one trip, but it can take a lot out of you emotionally & physically. In fact I hit a wall on Day 6 & the next couple of days were hard going. I'm the sort of person who gets energy from time alone, but during that first week I barely had any. I know family & friends were praying specifically about this, & praise God by Sunday I felt much better: re-energised for the rest of the trip.



Whilst away I missed 2 family birthdays, including Mum's. Having my laptop enabled me to keep in touch with folks back home, but Internet connection was sporadic. In fact Greg & I were like little kids on Christmas Day whenever we did find a WiFi connection. One day I spent 3 hours sitting in a hotel corridor just to stay connected to the Internet!

Travelling can be tiring & time-consuming; many hours in planes, trains, buses & cars, or waiting in airports & stations. On Monday (1st June) we travelled from Vienna to Ostrava & on 2nd June from Ostrava to Radomsko: a total of 14 hours & 7 different trains. Delays meant we missed connections & had to wait for the next train or backtrack to a station we'd just come through! I got to bed at 03.30! Train travel across most of Europe is fairly easy. Unlike UK you can pretty much get anywhere on a through-ticket, but the trains are often slow, stopping at every station. But as you can see from the above photo, I made the most of every opportunity to get some work done.



Leadership within the churches we're working with in Ukraine is very male-dominated & often pastors will only work with those in their 'clique'. It's a culture we have to work with, whilst trying to change. Occasionally you do see a ray of hope! My Police years were good preparation for working in this environment, but even so at times I found things hard going in Crimea. I was grateful when my friend Masha travelled up from Sevastopol to keep me company for a couple of days during the ALTC. In our 'free time' we swam in the Black Sea & had a walk along the coast, even seeing dolphins!

Another 'hardship' was missing some key football matches - last day of Premiership season, Championship play-offs, Champions League final & FA Cup! Jeff & I were at Kiev airport when we heard the amazing news that Burnley had been promoted to the Premiership. Incredible! We did manage to watch the Champions League final, crowded round a portable TV at the ALTC venue. Shouldn't have bothered!!

On the day I left home (24 May) we had a sneak-in burglary whilst Yvonne (my housemate/landlady) was out in the garden. She had her laptop stolen, but didn't think anything had gone from my room. A few days later I remembered my car keys were in my room: maybe the burglar had taken my car. I had no way of checking as Yvonne was also now away, so a colleague popped round to check for me. Praise the Lord, my car was still there. When I got home I saw that the burglar had searched my room pretty thoroughly, but only taken my 'loose change tin' (£40). So, it was a miracle that I was away on the trip after all. Most Sunday afternoons I'm out walking or cycling, so my laptop, purse etc would be in my room. Don't you just love the providence of God!!



Years ago, plodding round Burnley on cold winter nights, I never imagined that this is what I would end up doing. I still have to pinch myself at times. And even on tough days God has a way of bringing perspective. Like being away when our house was burgled, or waiting 2hrs for the plane to be fixed before we could fly home, knowing that 228 people had died when their plane crashed into the Atlantic last week. Believe me, I would have waited far longer! Then of course there are all the amazing people I get to meet. People who are full of faith despite the hardships they face. People with amazing testimonies of God's saving grace & provision. People who are passionate to see God move in their nation (left).

And although these things don't diminish my own difficulties they do help me to see them in the light of eternity. To see the bigger picture. God's perspective!

DIARY & PRAYER REQUESTS

Thank you for your faithful prayers & support. The coming months are no less busy, so please continue to remember me in your prayers. Here's what's coming up: -

Preaching: KRC, Burnley (21 June): New Life, Colne (5 July): Lewsey AOG, Luton (12 June)

Travel: I'm back in Crimea (24-29 June) visiting more potential church plants. By October we need to have 'chosen' the church planters we will be working with in Crimea. We already have some 'definites' but need to check out a few more & finalise plans. Please pray for wisdom & guidance in this process, & also for us as we look for the right project staff in Crimea.

Personal: Long w/e in Dublin (23-27 July). Going to see U2 & meet up with my friend Tammy & some of her family from USA!

Thank you for reading this newsletter. I have more to tell & will try to get some stories on my blog when time allows. Be filled with faith & courage. Whether you're in the storm or walking on water, fix your eyes on Jesus. *Judith x* (judith.linnell@nlieurope.com)