

New Life and a Fresh Start at the Farmhouse

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. John 8:36

One of the ministries that Mercy Projects supports is a Christian rehabilitation center for ex-prisoners in the east Ukrainian village of Larino. This ministry, run by Sergey Kazmenko, includes evangelism to prisons, the military, and discipleship of men after they are released.

Larino, a village in Eastern Ukraine - The small farmhouse sits on an acre of land near a slow-moving winding river. About 100 years old, the house is heated with coal, an abundant resource in the region. A few ex-prisoners take care of the place, gradually restoring the walls, the doors, the floor, bringing life and hope to this rustic home. Today the farmhouse is home for men like Alexander who have found a second chance in life.

"I would steal things to get money to pay for my drugs," Alexander said. "I was in prison for the third time and had lost everything. I also lost all connection to my wife and sons."

Alexander shared that he was angry at life and ashamed of going to prison again. He wore his anger like a badge of honor, but inside he had lost all hope.

"I was very proud and full of anger. It was impossible for me to trust anyone," he remembers.

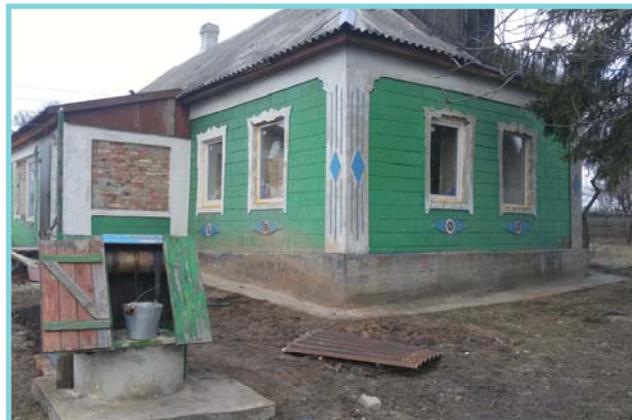
All that changed however, when God began to restore his life in March of 2011.

"It was during a service in our prison chapel. Several men came there to share the Gospel with us," Alexander said. "I listened and prayed." Without a smile, he humbly said, "I was saved."

Alexander Moved to the Farmhouse

When Alexander was released from his third prison term, his biggest challenge was living a new life outside of prison. "The temptation was great to return to the old life," he said.

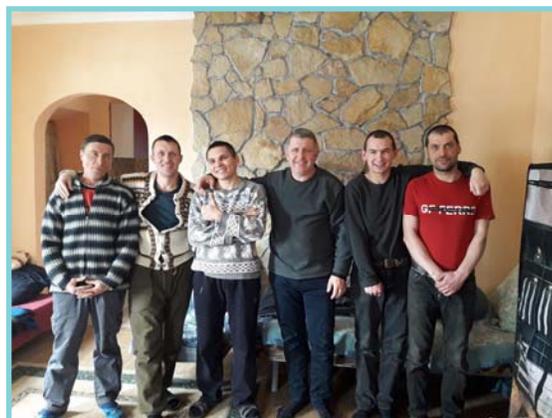
Sergey Kazmenko, a volunteer missionary with Mercy Projects, invited Alexander to join the other men in rehab at the discipleship farmhouse. This was exactly what Alexander needed. He found not only a place to live, but a place to grow in faith and rebuild his life.



The discipleship ministry has two homes now for men growing in their faith.



Alexander is humbly grateful for all God has done.



God is in the rebuilding and restoring process.

The Farm Has Grown

Mercy Projects director Jeff Thompson shared, “When I met Sergey and learned about his vision for the farmhouses, I knew that we must support this ministry. Since that time, we purchased a second house next door, but it still needs quite a bit of repair work.”

Sergey Kazmenko is no stranger to the challenges of life after prison. He previously was a notorious gang leader in Donetsk where he served three prison terms and even ended up in the same jail as Alexander for assaulting a police officer. In 1994 however, he found Christ in prison and a new ministry began.



The farm houses need renovation. The ministry is flourishing as men grow in faith, but they need our help.

“God called me to return to the prisons and preach the Gospel there. I also learned the importance of having a place for men to go to when they get released. It is not easy for these men to learn to walk with Christ and to live a new life back in society,” Sergey said.

Over 100 Men Have Completed the Program and Not Returned to Prison

Today over 100 men have been through his rehabilitation program with almost all of them successfully adapting to life without returning to prison.

“It’s an inspiration for me,” Sergey said. “I totally understand that it’s my calling from God to help prisoners especially in the prison where I repented myself. Going to prison gives men a new chance to repent like I did. When they accept Christ it’s wonderful to see their understanding of their need for salvation. But when they leave prison, sadly, many of them forget about God.”



Sergey preaches in the same prison where he was imprisoned.

“Our work is not just preaching salvation, but it is also helping them live for Christ on the outside. That’s why it’s vital that ex-prisoners attend local church. It’s also important to teach them to help themselves. We basically re-train them how to live their lives and be a true follower of Christ,” he said.

“My dream is to reconnect with my sons”

“When I first came here, they helped me to stand against temptations. It’s so difficult without the help of others. My life at the center has been life changing,” he said.

“In prison you learn the rules: Do not trust. Do not believe. Show no fear. Don’t ask questions. I was proud and angry, but Sergey has taught me humility, patience, and tolerance for others. Please pray for me. My dream is to reconnect with my sons, maybe get married one day; and I want to serve the Lord,” Alexander shared.



“It is so difficult without help,” Alexander said.