

January 2024

Rebuilding Lives in Southern Ukraine

To start the new year of 2024, our UK director Pete Wooding shares about his ministry trip to South Ukraine with Jeff to distribute winter supplies for the MP Christmas Fund.

Driving through what seemed like endless potholed, bumpy and muddy roads flanked by piles of rubble from destroyed homes, I couldn't help but worry about the landmine warning signs.

When Jeff invited me to join him on this trip to Ukraine I was excited but also worried. The landmine signs and debris all around didn't help. And then we arrived. Yuri and Nina live between Nikolaiv and Kherson surrounded by miles of dirt roads and tiny villages. Their story is inspiring.

These people seemed too happy. Their positive attitude and "can-do" spirit defied the surrounding reality. They are hard-working, in good health and certainly could have started a new life in a safer part of Ukraine.

I quietly wondered to myself. "Why would people return to a destroyed area where there is no electricity, no jobs, and Russian troops stationed 40 miles away?"

For Yuri and Nina the answer was simple. They had 14 volunteers staying in their partially rebuilt home. A generator provided some electricity. Nina cooked non-stop in her outdoor makeshift kitchen when she wasn't gathering eggs or helping neighbors.

They were serving Jesus. This was their home. People needed help. Volunteers needed a place to sleep on a floor and they were usually hungry. There was no time to complain or dream about a different life.

With a constant flow of people, Nina calmly led us out back to the dining hall. This, it appeared, was the ministry headquarters. Jesus was welcome and lives were being reborn and rebuilt.

"Even though we lost so much, we are grateful that God has protected us. We just want to give back to the community and help people rebuild their lives," they told us.

After eating lunch together, we went out to a field where there was a massive pile of chopped wood which MP had



Yuri and Nina could have sought a better life elsewhere. They didn't.



Nina gathers eggs from chickens that MP provided. She works tirelessly to serve people.



Pete preps to interview Yuri and Nina in the headquarters.

donated for Christmas. One by one, families arrived with their trailers. We loaded the trailers to help them stay warm through the winter.

Rather than a solemn atmosphere, it felt like a great celebration of people helping each other. The gentleman in the photo spontaneously hugged me and thanked me for coming. His hug and sincerity really touched my heart.

The truth is that nearly every home was damaged from the Russian occupation. But what we found was a determination and remarkable community spirit to rebuild their lives from the rubble. Nina looked at the work going on and said:

“Our dream is that this village will come alive again and life will come back here as people return who fled.”

Artillery Shells under the House

The next day we distributed winter supplies to families. We were shocked when visiting an elderly couple named Victor and Olga. Olga pointed to the ground under their home.

“We have unexploded artillery shells under our home right there,” she pointed. “We just cemented them in,” she said nonchalantly. Victor looked up and smiled as he continued to mix cement for plastering their walls. He never stopped working.

Cows and Farm Animals ran for their Lives

We visited Marina at her destroyed home and she shared her story with us.

“We are a farming family like everyone else in the village. When the fighting began I opened the gates to allow the animals to escape. Cows, goats, all kinds of animals were running across the fields away from the shelling.”

“After several days of hiding in the basement, we took our two children and fled the village. We were lucky,” she said.

Several months later, they returned to their village. I asked her while standing in the rubble of her home, how she was able to cling on to hope for the future. With a steely determination in her eyes she said:

“All our family members are alive and healthy. We thank God for that, and that we are all still together and survived this. If we can get through this we can get through anything as long as we stick together.”

Thank you for your support. Jesus is rebuilding lives.



Loading their trailers with firewood so they could stay warm through the winter.



Pete getting a hug from a man in the village.



We may help rebuild homes like Marina’s, but only Jesus can rebuild their lives.

Handwritten signature of JB Skemp.