

PARTNERS IN MISSIONS

Ray and Pam Trantham
Training National Leaders for Ministry
in Odessa, Ukraine

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*"In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your **partnership** in the gospel from the first day until now." Philipians 1:4-5*

Church Camp

Pam and I planned to spend the summer in Odessa. I would teach a couple of classes in the summer mission program and Pam would help Regina with the grandchildren because Sasha would be traveling and working in camps most of the summer. The first unexpected event was when our church planned a week of church camp, and asked me to be the "fireman." They apologized for asking me to do such a menial job, but explained they needed a responsible adult to handle the "fire." They then explained that we would be staying in large army tents and cooking on wood stoves and the job of the "fireman" was to keep the fire burning so the kitchen could operate. I was glad to get away for a week and enjoyed the time with the teenagers of our church who had put together an Olympic camp for the younger children. Campers were divided into countries (teams) as they participated for medals. Each country was asked to paint their own flag. All of the teams except the USA created flags that looked like the actual flags of the countries represented. The camp team representing the USA created a flag that depicted what they thought the USA stood for in the world. I am not sure that "pleasure, fast food, and entertainment" are the values Christians would like to portray to the world, but they certainly capture how the rest of the world sees us.



The "American" flag



Unplanned trip to Armenia

The second unplanned event was a sudden trip to Armenia. We have a group of summer students preparing to serve as missionaries. The goal is that these students will be sent out by their local churches to parts of the former Soviet Union that are increasingly closed to foreign missionaries. These students were scheduled to take a cross-cultural field trip during the first two weeks of August, while I was planning to work on an upcoming class. When these plans fell through at the last moment, I suggested Armenia as an option for a cross-cultural experience, but that meant that I would be leading the group. I have been teaching in Armenia for the past 17 years, but normally attend one of the area churches near the Bible college. I had previously traveled very little outside of the capitol city but enjoyed leading a group



of eight people to different outlying regions. In absolutely every place we visited, we met my former students and saw their ministries. The first Sunday we participated in three services. The first was a Russian speaking service led by one of my former students. The second was an Armenian service in the central church where several of my former students are ministering. The third was in a new church plant of another of my former students. During the first service I preached in



Russian, but the next two services my sermons and the student's participation was translated into Armenian. The next five days we conducted VBS's in four different churches. All four of these churches were new church plants and the ministers were my former students. We also held evening services and I was asked to lead a discussion about evangelism. We spent the next two days with three other former students in another new church work. During our time we traveled to the borders of Turkey, Iran, and Azerbaijan. In the last church the minister told me that Maria was one of the first fruits of this new church work. Maria had been one of the first children to come to church, to Sunday School, to youth meetings, and then eventually graduate from the Bible college in Armenia. But I realized that Maria was not alone. Sitting beside her was another former student from a distant town who would soon become her husband.



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