

UKRAINE

By David Wilson



BIG MOMMA IN KIEV

For many years we prayed that the Iron Curtain would fall and that the door for evangelism would open. I never thought that I would live to see it happen, but in 1991, Ukraine declared its independence from the USSR, and the communist party was banned. Unfortunately, poverty rather than riches followed, due to corruption and violent crime. This poverty, however, caused the people to look to God for answers.

In 1998, our Overseas Ministry Board Chairman (Steve Nelson) was invited to Ukraine with some pastors to teach at Kiev Christian University (KCU), a Bible college. He taught a class on open-air evangelism and took some students to the downtown plaza. One of the students assisting him was Anatoly Kushnirchuk, and although he didn't take the class, he never forgot what he saw. Steve mentioned to me that KCU should have an OAC

seminar the next year and that he would like to teach it.

In 1999, I arrived in Kiev and was met by some of the KCU staff. They took me on a tour that I shall never forget. As we went through the World War II museum, we saw hundreds of photos of the eight million Ukrainians who had been killed in various ways. Our translator wept. Then, we went to a Jewish memorial that showed hundreds of families being mowed down by Nazi machine guns, as the parents tried to shield their children with their bodies. In the forest, we were shown black crosses made like crows (a Ukrainian symbol of death) with pictures attached to the trees of people who were taken there and shot under Stalin's reign of terror. For the first time, I understood how much the Ukrainian people have suffered over many generations. Later, I would go to the Chernobyl area for evangelism and saw the devastation caused by atomic radiation. Many Christians also died under communism, and in church after church, I was told of pastors who had been taken to Siberia and never seen again.



KIEV CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY SEMINAR

It began to rain lightly as I took the KCU students out for open-air evangelism. My heart sank as I saw only a few people walking in the cold, but by faith, I began to paint a sketchboard message. Amazingly, people came and stood in the rain to listen. A local pastor counseled and prayed with those responding. People almost crushed us to get Bibles. It was very clear that God was going to use the OAC method of evangelism in Ukraine. By the end of the seminar, some of the students were preaching on the street, and people were listening.



ONE OF THE FIRST OPEN-AIR MEETINGS IN KIEV



ANATOLY PREACHING IN THE CENTER OF KIEV



WAR BETWEEN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE



SOLDIERS KILLED AND WIDOWS MADE

The vice president of the Baptist Union told me he wanted all the church leaders trained in our method.

The founding president of KCU also had a burden for evangelism, and we became good friends. I was invited back in 2000 to teach open-air evangelism to all the first-year students and to repeat this every year. God's hand was upon KCU, and many of the students trained were preaching their first evangelistic messages and leading their first souls to Christ. A great vision for missions was being caught at the college. In 2001, I taught a third seminar at KCU and asked Rob George (my OACI vice-president at the time) to join me. Anatoly was now a graduating student and took the seminar. The President of KCU and the Dean highly recommended him for our first OAC staff evangelist. On September 11, as we were going out, the president's wife rushed up to our vehicle and told us that the Twin Towers in New York City had fallen. I thought she had been watching a Hollywood movie, and we went out anyway. After we preached to good crowds, we returned to the campus and watched in horror as we saw the terrorist attack in the US being played over and over on TV. The next morning, it was a moving sight to see the Bible college students, former USSR citizens, on their knees praying for the US.

Anatoly (23) confirmed that God was calling him to be our pioneer evangelist for OAC Ukraine. This was an answer to three years of praying. God provided a very good Volkswagen van in Germany, which was driven to Kiev for us by a KCU staff member. Later, Anatoly married Yulia,

also a KCU graduate, and the next year another graduate (Eugene) joined and served a few years with them. In 2002, OAC was registered with the government under the umbrella of the Baptist Union. We used the name "World Wide Proclamation" as OAC would not translate into Ukrainian.

In almost every open-air meeting, the KCU students led people to the Lord. The next morning, they would share their experiences in class with great joy and excitement until they had to be stopped, so teaching could begin. The annual seminars continued each year, and our staff-led teams out for evangelism, which included three drama teams. This continued until the founder of KCU retired, and a new president was appointed. Unlike his predecessor, he canceled Americans coming to teach, stopped our seminars, and finally left a damaged KCU.

The ministry of OAC, however, continued, even in the country villages where hundreds came to see our Christian films, dramas, and gospel preaching. People asked that the film might be delayed so

that they could finish milking their cows by hand. They stood silently for two hours, and some prayed to trust Christ at the end of our message.

Anatoly's parents and family were granted visas to the US because they had been persecuted. His grandfather had been killed for hiding Jews during World War II. They asked Anatoly and Yulia to emigrate with them. It was a one-time offer, never to be repeated. Remaining true to their call, they refused, choosing rather to stay and reach their own countrymen for Christ!

The Baptist Union held its conference near Kiev, and several delegates from all over Ukraine and Russia attended. Both presidents met with us, and the vice president (now our board chairman) told how OAC had helped their churches in evangelism and how they had seen fruit come into their churches. The Russian president said that only God could have timed our meeting together! We were asked to present the OAC ministry to the whole conference, and this resulted in Anatoly coming to train and lead out churches in evangelism in Siberia, Crimea, and Belarus.

Most people's hearts in Ukraine were open to the Gospel, but some orthodox and communist people opposed us. The ministry of OAC, however, was not hindered. We even preached in the main plaza of Kiev, something unthinkable a few years before. Now, even the police stopped and watched as the Gospel went forth to large crowds.

In 2014, tragedy struck Ukraine. Over 600 were killed in the center of Kiev through the war started by Russia, and 85 died on one dark day. Anatoly was there on that day. In the same plaza where he had preached so many times, the battle raged as he was manning a prayer tent. Men would come into the tent, put their guns down on a table, and sit and pray with him and other Christian leaders. Many Gideon New Testaments were given out. On this particular day, a policeman-friend loaned Anatoly a flack jacket, which was the only day he wore it. He was crouched behind a barrier with a nurse when a man was shot nearby. The nurse ran to his aid. She was shot in the neck. Anatoly immediately ran to her aid, putting his fingers on her neck to stop the blood. Something knocked him down from behind. He didn't know what it was. He got up, put his fingers back on her vein, and dragged her back behind the barrier. She lived, but the man died. Later, Anatoly looked at the back of his bulletproof vest and found two sniper bullets. The nurse, whose life Anatoly had saved, was sent to a German hospital, and he sent her a New Testament. Truly, God had spared his life on that dark day, as He had more work for His servant to do in Ukraine.



CHAPLAIN ANATOLY GIVING OUT BIBLES



PARTICIPATING IN FUNERALS



SOLDIER FACING DEATH READING SCRIPTURE

Now registered as a volunteer Army Chaplain, Anatoly wears a badge and always holds a Bible in his hand. When speaking to a large group of soldiers, he has to wear a robe. He is one of the distributors of gifts for Samaritans Purse, and he goes on the eastern front line giving these gifts and the Gospel to children. He is also providing food and New Testaments to the soldiers. Officers are calling on him to talk to their men. The mayor of his home town sent a van full of supplies with him for the soldiers. The soldiers ask him to pray for them and teach them how to trust the Lord. Very often, they pray their first prayer. Many of the officers were brought up under communism and taught to be atheists. Now, when the first shell goes over their heads, they pray! Every day, they can see many miracles of God's protection during the heavy shelling, as they know their chaplain, and many believers are praying for them.



YULIA, ANASTASIA & ANATOLY

Additionally, Anatoly and Yulia are taking care of the families of fallen soldiers, where there is a lot of grief, broken lives, children without fathers, and deep psychological problems. In his small town of Bucha, they have 15 fallen heroes. Recently, Anatoly lost one of his closest friends in the war, who was killed by enemy sniper fire. He often went to see him in his front line position and brought him various aid packages from home. His death left three children and a pregnant wife behind. Eventually, unable to endure such grief, she suffered a miscarriage. It was a double tragedy. Yulia and Anatoly keep close to that widow and her children. They often talk to her about what happened, about God, and how the Lord can help them live on. Her name is Valentina.

Living dependant on the Lord completely, Anatoly and Yulia recently saw God answer their prayer for a new ministry van. One dedicated couple from Florida donated the funds necessary for the purchase of a replacement Volkswagen van from Germany. It had never been driven on the ice and snow of a Ukrainian winter.

Anatoly writes: "From the beginning of the war, we see that Ukrainians have become more open to God and His Word. The war crippled many destinies and deprived many of hope. Hearts are full of many emotional wounds; they are looking for healing and are open to God. Therefore, we continue to preach the Good News of peace through Christ during the war."

Whether it's wartime or peacetime, Anatoly and Yulia continue their ministry on the front line of evangelism in Ukraine, knowing it is for the eternal kingdom and glory of God.



ANATOLY TEACHING NEW SOLDIERS AND SHARING CHRIST