

BCMWorld

An Inside Look at BCM Global Ministries



Sharing
God's Hope
with the Hopeless and Homeless



VOLUNTEERING FOR GOD-VENTURE IN ROMANIA

By: Jeanette Windle with Daniel Rusu

“Me! Me! I’ll do it!” Volunteering for new adventures was nothing new for BCM Romania missionary Daniel Rusu, whether skydiving in his teens or a university major with few job opportunities—aircraft engineering. But when caught in Romania’s bloody revolt against communist rule in December, 1989, Daniel could have never envisioned that within eighteen months he’d be volunteering to run a Christian children’s home. Much less to find himself openly teaching theology in a country where religious expression had been suppressed for seven decades.

Daniel Rusu’s own father Dumitru had actually been a communist freedom fighter during the overthrow of Romania’s monarchy. When a political falling-out resulted in Dumitru’s own imprisonment, a Christian acquaintance came to the aid of his wife and two young sons. When Dumitru was released four years later, he found his wife a committed Christian. She in turn led Dumitru to Christ.

By Daniel’s birth several years later, Dumitru was a powerful evangelist in Romania’s underground church. He also helped distribute Bibles and other Christian materials, a risky pursuit under the communist regime. Dumitru passed away just months before the fall of communism. Since Dumitru was careful to protect his family, Daniel never knew growing up just how much danger and persecution his father faced.

“A friend of my father from the United States came to



Romania [after fall of communism],” Daniel shares now. “When he found out I was Dumitru’s son, he asked if I remembered the time police entered our house to search for Christian literature. I had no idea!”

Simply being known as the son of Christians made life difficult. Daniel’s brothers, 8 and 10 years older, remembered well having a father in prison as well as the mocking and pressure from teachers at school when it became known that their parents had become Christians. By Daniel’s teen years, his brothers had completely rejected their parents’ faith. But they were also living very unhappy lives.

“I felt the same way until I was in high school,” Daniel remembers. “I thought people would reject me if I became

a believer. But I was also scared to become like my brothers, and without the faith of my parents, I knew I would be like them.”

Daniel made an open commitment to Christ in his mid-teens and became openly involved in youth ministry. When he entered college at age 17, he did not shrink from sharing his faith, even leading one roommate to Christ. By December, 1989, Daniel had graduated from university. When the revolution began, he was working as an engineer in a plant that produced Puma attack helicopters. Television screens showed riots and government troops firing on unarmed civilians. Then orders arrived to arm the helicopters in production for missile strikes against protestors. The helicopters had taken off when the plant workers themselves rebelled. Forcing the plant director to call back the helicopters, they broke the propellers so the aircraft could not take off again.

The workers then gathered to march into the nearest city, 10 kilometers away, to join other protestors. Daniel remembers well when their crowd of a thousand-plus marchers ran into a sizeable armed force blockading a small bridge ahead. Rumor said that government troops were using only blind [non-lethal] bullets. But when the soldiers sprayed fire above the crowd, Daniel saw tree branches falling.

“Those are real bullets!” Daniel told a friend. “We have to escape by jumping in the river.”

The two did so and were eventually able to reach Daniel’s family home, where they holed up until the fighting was over. On Christmas Day, 1989, Romania’s brutal dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu was executed for genocide and war crimes. Daniel remembers well the confusion of those early days after the fall of communism:

“At first, I was thinking of trying to run away [from Romania], knowing that I could face torture. In the past, people who revolted were tortured. Then when freedom really did come, I could have left the country. But I had a feeling now is my turn. I could do what I had missed the most, sharing my faith everywhere, anywhere, anytime.”

So Daniel Rusu stayed. But while he now had freedom to share his faith, he no longer had a profession since the Soviet Union’s collapse had terminated any market for Romanian-built military aircraft. But life held one bright spot. September, 1990, marked Romania’s first Christian youth camp since the fall of communism. Attending, Daniel met the winner of the camp’s Bible quiz competition, a young medical student named Daniela.

“As soon as I met her, I was very impressed with her Bible knowledge,” Daniel says now with a grin. “I knew I wouldn’t mess up if I had her for my wife!”

By the end of camp, Daniel had proposed, and by November, the young couple were officially engaged. Daniela returned to her medical studies. That following spring, a German Christian arrived in Romania, looking for volunteers to start an orphanage. Daniel’s heart had already been wrung by the thousands of orphans and abandoned children left roaming the streets since the revolution shut down all state institutions.



Pictures:

Page 2 top to bottom- Romanian Revolution 1989-
Image Source : www.comunismulinromania.ro ;
Dobrovat House orphanage children and staff with
Daniel Rusu back center

Page 3 top to bottom- Teaching Gypsy Bible school
students; Daniel Rusu teaching at youth camp;
Wedding Photo of Daniel and Daniela Rusu (center in
suit/brown dress)

“Me! Me!” he immediately volunteered. “My mom was cook in a government orphanage, so I grew up chopping cabbage in their kitchen. I can do this!”

Under Daniel’s leadership, the orphanage expanded to ministry with street children, then a farm where abandoned and handicapped children could live as well as learn agricultural skills. Meanwhile, Daniel and Daniela were married in 1992. Daniela finished her degree in nuclear medicine, specializing in thyroid cancer. In time, a son, Enoch, and daughter, Ioana, were born.

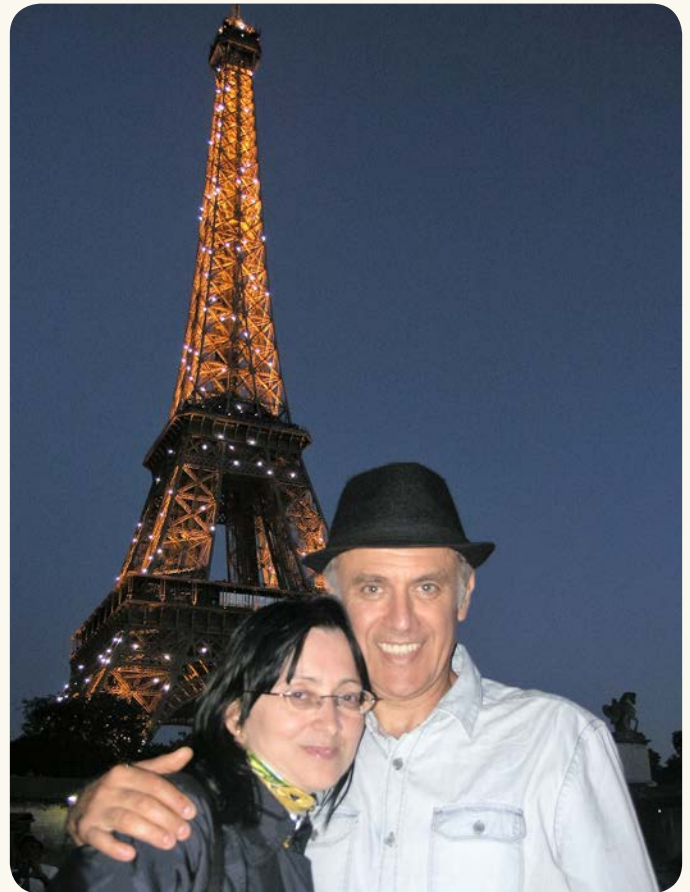
But freedom had not brought complete peace to Romania, including within the body of Christ. One consequence of the communist years had been a great lack of Bibles or any systematic theological teaching. Now false cults were flooding the country, sowing chaos and dissension within the newly-liberated churches. Daniel’s concern was not only for the Romanian Christian community, but to deepen his own understanding of Scripture. He began seeking opportunities for Bible training, among them a Bible study program from the Navigators, a global Christian discipleship ministry.

Then in 1993, Daniel was introduced to an American missionary couple who had arrived in Romania to help found a Bible college. Both Daniel and his wife Daniela were among the first to enroll for studies. In 1995, [Centrul de Instruire Biblica Betleem \(CIBB\)](#) or Bethlehem Bible College, was officially incorporated.

After two years, the Rusus received sponsorship for further seminary training at Capital Bible Seminary in Washington, D.C., where BCM president emeritus Dr. Bob Evans taught. Returning to Romania in 1999, Daniel became a fulltime Bible teacher. By that point, Romania’s deteriorated medical system could no longer support hi-tech specializations like nuclear medicine. Daniela began working instead for a Christian publishing house, translating Old Testament commentaries. Daniel also began an outreach ministry with Gypsies (Romany) as well as Chinese immigrant laborers, both underprivileged groups in Romania. Evangelistic campaigns took him all over eastern Romania. The Gypsy ministry developed into a full church.

It was 2009 when the Rusus returned to the U.S. to visit ministry partners stemming from their seminary days, including Dr. Bob Evans and other BCM acquaintances. A few months later Daniel attended BCM candidate orientation. He was commissioned as a BCM missionary just in time for another major life change. Daniela received an invitation to use her medical specialty—in France.

After much prayer, the Rusus accepted the invitation. But that has not ended their ministry in Romania. Daniel travels regularly into Romania, teaching module courses at two Bible colleges. In summer, the family returns to help with youth camps and street kids ministry. From France, Daniel continues to work with Romanian students through on-line courses and other internet services. Meanwhile, since Daniel can never say no to a new challenge, he has also started outreach ministry to international university students as well as to France’s own marginalized Gypsy children.



Daniel and Daniela Rusu

“The Bible says to help orphans, widows, strangers,” Daniel reminds. “This is what we do.”

Daniel Rusus’ ultimate goal is to see his own students taking the Gospel to Romania and the rest of the world. He shares of a recent letter from one former student, who has given up his engineering career to serve as a missionary in Papua New Guinea.

“We have other students who have gotten involved into missions as well,” says Daniel. “Praise the Lord!”

Looking back on his journey to faith and freedom and forward to the future of Romania’s church, Daniel Rusu points to one of his own heroes of the faith, Romanian pastor Richard Wurmbrand, who spent many years in communist prisons for his faith (see biography *Tortured for Christ*), eventually founding Voice of the Martyrs, which works on behalf of persecuted Christians worldwide.

“When asked before he died [in 2001] what would be his final advice for those of us who are left, Richard Wurmbrand said, ‘Be aggressive’. I think we as Christians have to be aggressive. We are engaged into a spiritual battle. There is no time to withdraw from that battle. We have to be aggressive in that battle like Jesus.”

One characteristic Daniel Rusu has never lacked. When it comes to carrying the good news of Jesus Christ to Romania’s new generation, Daniel’s refrain remains an emphatic “Me! Me! I’ll do it!”

NOT LOOKING BACK IN PERSECUTION-TORN NORTH INDIA



By Jeanette Windle with Paul Padmaker, Executive Director BCM India

In October, 2015, a fundamentalist Hindu mob attacked a BCM church in Begaipeda village in northern India's Jharkhand State. The church had been growing steadily since its founding in 2010, and the believers had constructed a small sanctuary on a piece of land donated by a church member. The mob's target was the pastor, BCM church-planting missionary, Rev. Sunil Munda. When they couldn't find him, they attacked other believers and damaged church furnishings. Due to local hostility, Rev. Sunil Munda has not been able to return to Begaipeda, but he has already started another church in a nearby village. Meanwhile, the Begaipeda congregation continues to grow under the leadership of local church elders.

But the Begaipeda attack was not the news bulletin BCM leadership in North India's Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh states was excitedly reporting to BCM India headquarters in Hyderabad. Attacks on believers, violent disruptions of revival meetings, destruction of homes and churches have long been a part of daily life for Christians in this region. The cause of excitement and rejoicing was a record number of new believers and baptisms reported by BCM India's 17 missionary church planters in these two states during the 2015-2016 calendar year.

In total, more than 2100 men, women, and children accepted Jesus Christ as Savior with more than 660 baptisms.

The two adjoining states of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh are largely rural in demographics. More than 60 million total population includes many tribal groups, including the Ho, Santhali, Matho, and Munda communities. Poverty and illiteracy rates are among India's highest, especially in the rural areas.



Pictures

Top: BCM Church Begaipeda

Bottom: Village church service-North India



BCM ministry in this region began in 2005 with just three BCM missionary evangelists sharing the Gospel predominantly in rural tribal villages. As villagers turned to Christ, dozens of believer groups were organized, then full church congregations. By 2009 the BCM team included 27 young leaders who had dedicated their lives for fulltime ministry and undergone training in church planting at BCM India's [Ebenezer Prayer Centre](#) in Hyderabad.

Most of these trainees are from tribal background. Because they came to Christ from other religions/faiths, many have been shunned by their families and even expelled from their home communities. But this has not quelled their zeal to share their faith. As more churches

were planted, Rev. K.E. Joseph, BCM co-ordinator for North India, began conducting training programs in the region for pastors, evangelists, and other ministry leaders.

Today, a total of 17 BCM missionary church planters, 12 in Jharkhand and 5 in Chhattisgarh, oversee 56 churches along with 109 believer groups (fellowship groups not yet organized into formal churches with appointed elders/deacons) across these two states. Over the past two years, an additional 50 young people have received training to assist in church and outreach ministries.

Apart from regular worship services, this includes revival meetings, women's meetings, youth assemblies, Vacation Bible Schools. Recently two candidates qualified to teach ISMT (In Step with the Master Teacher), BCM's children's ministry training curriculum. They are now conducting training programs for Sunday School teachers and children's outreach leadership. Since one pastor typically oversees several churches, well-trained lay leadership is vital. Another exciting outreach has been a bore-well program, providing clean water not only to church members, but offered freely in the name of Jesus to village neighbors.

Which does not lessen the challenges BCM ministry leaders face daily in this region. The testimony of Rev. Ful Chand Mahato is representative of many of BCM India's missionary pastors. From the Matho tribe in Jharkhand, Ful Chand came to Christ through an outreach ministry. When his family promptly ex-communicated him, a Christian believer gave him shelter and later helped enrol in a two-



year Bible training course.

After completing the training, he began ministry as an evangelist. He was not permitted back into his own village, but began outreach in another village called Amda. This was a daunting challenge since there were no other Christians. Worse, hostile locals accused him of forcibly converting people, a crime punishable by a lengthy prison sentence, even publishing the accusations in a local newspaper.

Rev. Ful Chand refused to get angry or to quit. Today the Amda church has 70 members and continues to grow. Meanwhile he shares his faith whenever possible with friends from his tribal community. Two of these friends have not only accepted Christ, but have started prayer fellowships in their own villages.

In 2009, Rev. Ful Chand attended BCM's church planter training in Hyderabad and shortly after was commissioned as a BCM missionary. In 2011, he was appointed BCM supervisor for the states of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. Many of the missionaries, pastors, and church leaders he now oversees could share similar stories.

"The Lord Jesus said, 'No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God' (Luke 9:62)," reminds Paul Padmaker, Executive Director of BCM India.

"Even though there are only 17 pastors, the BCM ministry is growing in these two states in spite of persecution and challenging situations. The people from the villages are so eager to listen to the Word of God and respond to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I thank and praise God for the way God is using our BCM pastors to bring more and more people into the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. We give all the glory to God."



Pictures

Top Left: BCM supervisor Rev. Ful Chand Dedicates Bore Well

Top Right: BCM Church Begaipeda

Bottom: Village church service-North India





NO PLACE TO LAY THEIR HEAD

Report from Meashed Liyanage, BCM Sri Lanka Director

Sri Lanka's worst disaster since the 2004 tsunami started unexpectedly when Tropical Storm Roanu arrived May 15-16, 2016, weeks ahead of the normal monsoon season. Within 48 hours, the heaviest rains in a quarter-century had dumped over 300 millimeters (approximately one foot) into already overflowing rivers. Resulting landslides have left entire villages buried in mud. With rains continuing, hundreds of thousands have driven from their homes. The heaviest struck has been Sri Lanka's capital, Colombo, where BCM's country headquarters is located, where more than 200,000 have been evacuated from flood zones.

"It was a very scary situation," writes

BCM Sri Lanka Director Meashed Liyanage, "as we could visibly see the rising water levels washing away houses and burying buildings. Due to landslides, many hundreds died while they were asleep in their beds. Many children were among the casualties."

BCM Sri Lanka has faced disaster before. Along with a thirty-year civil war, the 2004 tsunami left more than 30,000 dead. BCM Sri Lanka was actively involved in assisting thousands with relief aid and helping them rebuild their lives through BCM's network of local churches. With this experience, BCM Sri Lanka immediately began organizing relief efforts, putting together a dozen teams made up of volunteers from BCM churches, many of them young people. With aid coming from BCM's global

family, volunteers have worked around the clock, packaging up food, dry clothing, powdered milk, and other necessities for distribution.

Meashed describes, "We were able to go with our volunteer teams to help assist with evacuations and supply essential aid food and warm clothing. It's a blessing to have a wonderful cooperative youth group who is passionate to help, and our teams were deployed to many areas. It wasn't an easy task as the roads were damaged and rain was continually pouring. We wanted to go places where no one else had yet gone. We met personally so many who had been left out when it came to getting help. We made it a point not to just drop off goods, but to go and visit them one by one at their homes."





Which has not been easy. Floodwaters and landslides have not been the only risks. Contamination from sewage overflow and rotting matter is making disease an even greater threat than the original floods. Beyond those trapped by floods, many others have refused evacuation, remaining perched on roofs or upper stories to protect any remaining possessions from looters. Some areas have been classified as too dangerous for civilians to enter. But BCM teams were able to work in conjunction with military rescue units to ferry aid in to trapped residents.

Meashed notes the hard work and enthusiasm of their younger volunteers in particular: "Our youth, who have been actively involved, were so encouraged that they were able to take part in rescue and helping with aid to many hundreds of people. Some of them braved deep waters, taking relief aid. As I witnessed their commitment and passion, I too was much encouraged."

Several BCM church buildings have been damaged, including Pussellawa, Yatiyantota & Badulla. In Pussellawa, a regional hub for BCM outreach (see [BCM World, Issue #1, 2015](#)), a landslide under the foundation has left a crack running down the middle of the church. Homes of many church members have been affected as well. Meashed shares of one such family:

"There was one place I went with Dad [[Rev. Susiri Liyanage, BCM Asia Director](#)]. This whole family comes to church regularly. The father was staying close, keeping an eye on things that had gone underwater to stop

any one looting. When he saw us, his eyes filled with tears. He said he didn't expect us to be there. Trust me, no one wants to walk in dirty water with sewer all over the place! But we wanted to be there with our people. This man was so happy. His house was filled with water to my waist. Everything was floating. But we saw a bright light in his face. He felt strong because he knew he is not alone. We prayed and encouraged him, then gave him some aid to pull through the next few days. We went back later when the water had receded to bring dry rations, clothing, and items for the damaged house. This is just one short story out of many hundreds we could tell."

Rescue efforts are far from over. With monsoon season just beginning, more floods and landslides are expected. Urgent ongoing needs include medical supplies and attention for those affected by contaminated water and flood-borne diseases. Shelter is needed for those who have lost homes as well as textbooks and other supplies so students can return to school [April-July is 2nd of 3 terms in Sri Lankan school calendar].

"This was a wonderful opportunity to show the love of Christ to many in desperate need," Meashed Liyanage expresses on behalf of the BCM Sri Lanka team. "We want to thank everyone who has donated so far. And those who are still donating for our second phase to help rebuild. Many have lost their entire life investments. It is always the poor and vulnerable who suffer the most, and our commitment and work has been among these groups. I believe it is part



of our responsibility to bring light to their lives with whatever help and encouragement we can offer. Together I trust there is much that can be achieved."

BCM Sri Lanka is continuing to help displaced people by providing, among other things, powdered milk and meal packets for children staying in shelters. Any aid that is offered will be used entirely to help the displaced people of Sri Lanka. Volunteers from churches are working to distribute personally the food and essentials. If in addition to praying for our Sri Lanka team, you would like to participate in this emergency response, donations can be made at: <https://bcmintl.org/sri-lanka-flood/>

Pictures:

Top left to right: Rescuing flood victims; Picking up flood victims; Sri Lanka flood panorama; Praying with flood refugees

Bottom page 8: Launching aid boat, Meashed Liyanage in ball-cap and jeans, forefront

SHARING “FIHAVANANA” WITH MADAGASCAR’S MOST VULNERABLE



By Lisa Biegert

The island nation of Madagascar, located off Africa’s southeastern coast, practices what is known locally as *fiHAVANANA*, a term encompassing concepts of unity, brotherhood, and general peace. To the Malagasy [i.e., Madagascar ethnicity] people, this means having strong relationships with others and taking care of the world around them. Malagasy national and country Director for BCM International’s newest ministry field Mr. Ratovohery Jean Aimé, or “Hery”, grew up practicing *fiHAVANANA*. But it was not until 1990 that he saw the connection of brotherhood and peace to having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Like most Malagasy, Hery grew up believing in one Creator God, but he had little interest in God or church. By 1990, he had completed a bachelor degree at the university and was studying English [Madagascar’s official language is Malagasy with French its second language] when a friend invited him to church. Though he had little interest in the prospect of a church service, he accepted the invitation.

“It was as if the pastor knew everything about me, and he was addressing me personally,” says Hery now. “It made me realize that it was actually God who had invited me to church, and I surrendered my life to Him. I felt like I had a new life. I had an ongoing, earnest desire to study the Bible.”



After a few years of listening to Bible studies on a Christian radio station, Hery started his own Bible study with a group from the university English department. By now he was fluent in English, and he began also helping missionaries from an international Christian organization called Bible Study Fellowship. Hery eventually became a leader, serving with BSF until 2003.

In 1997, Hery opened a small English language center of his own. Over time, this expanded into both an elementary and secondary education center. His wife, Vero, helps supervise the teachers when she is not busy with their five children. Bible clubs are held in each class once a week. In almost twenty years since the school opened, Hery and Vero have seen more than 3000 children give their lives to the Lord through this ministry.

Hery has also been able to establish Bible clubs in other private and state-run schools, thanks to good relationships he has built with school administrations. To date, there are 13 clubs in Itaosy, a suburb of Antananarivo, Madagascar’s capital. An additional six clubs are located in

When asked about prayer requests for BCM Madagascar, Hery responded: “Please join with us in praying for finances to support additional missionaries and more missions work in Madagascar. If you are led by God to serve here with us, short term or long term, we would be excited to work together as brothers and sisters in the Lord. Any qualifications or abilities you have can be used by God to preach the Gospel, regardless of your age. For instance, you could teach in our kids clubs, especially if you can teach English, too. If you are a physician, you could bring medical services. Truly, the opportunities are endless. We also try to help by meeting physical needs along with spiritual needs. We are always looking for donations of items such as clothes, toys for kids, and school supplies. These items can help a number of people here and can ultimately be a way to lead them to Christ.”

Fihavanana.

Unity.

Peace.

Brotherhood.

Jesus Christ.

Mr. Ratovohery Jean Aimé and his BCM Madagascar team are committed to bringing the truth of the Gospel into the Malagasy lifestyle of *fihavanana*. Their desire is to show the people of Madagascar how true unity, peace, and brotherhood are found only in the person of Jesus Christ, and thus transform this beautiful island nation.

If you are interested in giving to this ministry, visit <https://bcmintl.org/madagascar/>.

Pictures top to bottom: Handing out aid; Hery sharing the Gospel; Bible club with tracts to take home



FINDING REFUGE IN HIS EVERLASTING ARMS



By Rick Erb,
BCM missionary
Ukraine/Poland

REFUGEE! Recent global events have caused a tsunami of refugees to hit the shores of many countries, including my own birth nation, the United States. Probably none of us wants or expects to be a refugee. But several months ago it occurred to me that I am indeed one of those refugees who had to flee their homeland as an act of self-preservation. For me, it was my adopted homeland of eastern Ukraine from which I fled.

So one might ask how an American happened to be living in Ukraine. Certainly, any number of Ukrainians have wondered! I had been working in a clinical laboratory for almost fourteen years when God impressed upon me that it was time to be a part of His work in another country. For one year I worked with a team of eight other Americans in northern Russia. After my initial year, I returned for another eight months of ministry in another Russian city. Returning to the USA, I studied Bible and Missions at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. In 2000, I began serving at the



international ministry center (IMC) of BCM international.

While at the IMC, I learned of an opportunity to join a few other BCM missionaries who were ministering in the city of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine. When I arrived there in 2002, I had no idea how long I would be working for Jesus in Ukraine, but it turned out to be almost twelve years. God opened doors for me to be involved in several ministries, including preaching in a small local church and rehabilitation for men struggling with alcohol and drug issues. Perhaps the most enjoyable and exciting ministry for me was partnering with the Ukrainian arm of Campus Crusade [now CRU]

in evangelistic English clubs.

The first Monday of March, 2014, is a day I'll remember for a long, long time. I had been watching the situation in Ukraine deteriorate day by day. The Ukrainian Revolution in February, 2014, had ousted pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych, and riots and protests were tearing the country apart, especially in eastern

Pictures:

Above- Barricade line separating troops and protesters as the conflict developed (Photo by Mstyslav Chernov www.unframe.com)

Below- Gdansk Old Town, Poland



Ukraine where much of the population is ethnic Russian. Russia had begun a covert occupation of Crimea, and the Russian parliament had authorized deployment of troops to Ukraine to restore calm.

I was praying a lot, inquiring of God about perhaps leaving Ukraine for a while. Early that Monday morning, I read an article written by a former U.S. intelligence official who had worked in Ukraine. He felt there was a strong possibility of Russian troops arriving in Donetsk as early as that weekend. Was this a word from the Lord? I wasn't sure, but it certainly got my attention!

The rest of that day was fairly normal. I rode the bus to a nearby town to teach my usual 2 o'clock English class. When I returned home, I had no idea this evening would be my last there. I'll never forget the ringing of my cellphone around 6:00pm. The caller was a Ukrainian friend who lived in another city several hours away. He didn't call often, so I was happy to hear from him. But I immediately noticed his tone, which was unusually direct and intensely animated.

"Where are you?" he demanded.

"I am home near Donetsk," I replied.

"Rick, you have got to leave there right away . . . tonight. Russia has started a war with Ukraine!"

I was shocked and saddened. Again I prayed, "Lord, is this call a word from you to confirm my feelings?" I really did NOT want to leave Ukraine. I had finally gotten adjusted to life there and was happy in my little home in a village not far outside Donetsk. I'd seen the Holy Spirit working with several of my English club students recently trusting in Christ and receiving baptism. The thought of being torn away from my life in Ukraine brought me to my knees, truly wanting to weep as I cried out to God.

My imagination and emotions swirled as I packed up a few belongings. I believed optimistically I'd be able to return in a few months. In hindsight, this was blissful ignorance, and in fact, I have yet to return and have lost all remaining belongings I had left in that house. Around 10pm that evening, a Ukrainian friend drove me to the train station in Donetsk.

I stayed all night in the waiting area, unable in my state of mind to sleep a wink. Early Tuesday morning, I boarded a train heading for the capital city of Kiev in northcentral Ukraine. The weather was foggy, and my imagination got the best of me as I wondered



if Russian troops had already reached Donetsk. Perhaps they would stop the train! But as the train pulled away unhindered, it appeared I had made my escape. In actuality, it would be another month before the Russians invaded Donetsk, the fighting spreading from there to other regions of eastern Ukraine. Once Donetsk was well behind us, I called my friend. He sounded happy that I had taken his advice, but I still wondered a bit if I had done the right thing.

So here we are over two years later. I still don't know if or when I'll ever be able to return to Donetsk. While this is sad and disappointing, it has helped me greatly empathize with all the displaced persons in our world today that we call refugees. As for this refugee, I have taken refuge in the everlasting arms of the eternal God. And over and over again, I have found Him to be a good and faithful God.

Four months after leaving Ukraine, I flew to south Poland to participate in several English and Bible camps. Every summer since 2005, I had traveled from Ukraine to participate in this fantastic and fruitful ministry to Polish teenagers. Towards the end of the 2014 camp season, I received an invitation from a pastor I'd met at one of the camps to live, work, and minister for one year in his home city of Gdansk on the northern coast of Poland. After prayer and thought, I recognized this was an opportunity

from God and accepted his invitation.

The year in Gdansk proved a time of great help and healing for me. I became part of a small church family that ministered God's love to me in many wonderful ways. Through teaching English at a private school there, God opened doors for friendships that have led in turn to opportunities to share my faith in Jesus.

So what am I doing these days? Even as I write this article, I am currently back in Gdansk for two months. An earlier friendship has already led to an opportunity to share a clear Gospel message from the book of Genesis. I do stand amazed at the power of God's Word. Sometimes, all it takes is giving a copy to someone and suggesting they read it. Such was the case with one young man, Sylvester, who started attending the Gdansk church in the fall of 2014. As he described in his own words, he was struggling in his life and fighting against God. Today he is a strong believer and growing in his faith walk. How did it happen? Through reading God's amazing book called the Bible and through the love demonstrated towards him by God's people in the church here. That's the way it should be!

I am currently looking to the Lord for His guidance as to where He wants me next. Meanwhile I am very thankful for all that He has taught me

through the events of these last two years, as well as the kindness and love of dear friends in Poland, Ukraine, the USA and elsewhere. These folks are a reminder that even if I am currently homeless and a "refugee", I will always be part of a greater family—the family of God.

We live in dangerous times, and our world may seem to be coming apart. It's easy to connect these troubling things with the word "crisis". But God sees things from a different perspective and quite possibly has a different word in mind: "opportunity". What opportunities is He bringing your way today? Know any refugees that need a good dose of God's love? May I encourage you to prayerfully take action. You will be blessed! As God once promised a ministry leader caught in the middle of crisis and conflict: ***"Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told" (Habakkuk 1:5).***

Pictures:

Page 14 top to bottom- Rick Erb's home, Eastern Ukraine; Rick Erb teaching English Club, Odessa, Ukraine

Below- Baptism of Sylvester (center) at the Carrol Baltic Sea, Gdansk



Photo by Sasha Maksymenko



Forced to leave yet willing to serve. Read about the way God is using the troubles of this world and the missionaries of BCM International to reach the lost.

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BCM International is a global Bible-Centered Ministry dedicated to making disciples of all age groups for the Lord Jesus Christ through evangelism, teaching, and training so that churches are established and the Church strengthened.

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