



Letter # 26 December 2007



# Manna Messenger

Mike & Judy Manna, Eurasia Director, Youth Ministry International

Mailing Address: Mike & Judy Manna  
17 Dragomanova, kb. 149  
Kyiv 02068 UKRAINE

Support Address: Youth Ministry International  
1300 Envoy Circle Suite 1306  
Louisville, KY 40299

Email: [kievmanna@yahoo.com](mailto:kievmanna@yahoo.com) (Mike)  
[judy.manna@yahoo.com](mailto:judy.manna@yahoo.com) (Judy)

Website: [www.youthdiscipler.com](http://www.youthdiscipler.com)

## Ukraine Holiday Traditions

### December 25th is not Christmas in Ukraine

If you are ever with us in Kyiv on December 25th, you will notice that all the stores are open, people continue to go to work and only the Baptist churches have special church services. Most Ukrainians celebrate Christmas on January 7th. This date is Orthodox Christmas based on the Julian calendar, which has a 13 day difference from the Gregorian calendar.

### The New Years Tree

Ukrainians decorate New Years trees, not Christmas trees. Typically, they are put up about one week before New Years. It is very difficult to find a live tree before December 20th in Kyiv to buy. On New Years Eve day, you will find shoppers with their carts full of vodka. Then, on New Years Eve, presents are exchanged between family and friends.

## Rural Adventure – A Visit to Katya’s Family From Judy

We have so much to be grateful for this Christmas. I honestly do not know how people survive normal life without a close relationship with the Lord. It is so good to know that God is our Father and is always watching over us. We are never outside of His care, and we are never, *ever* alone. We are so grateful that Jesus gave up His position in Heaven to come to earth as a baby – so He could grow up and give His life to be our Savior!

Katya and I recently went to visit her family. None of Katya’s family are believers, and their lives are empty without the Lord. They do not have His help and protection like we do. They do not have the assurance of His love. It makes us very sad. We do our best to share God’s love and truth with them, but their view of God is only religious at this point. Jesus has His place in picture form on a small table in a corner of each of their houses, along with pictures of several saints.

Mike was not able to go with us, so on Sunday, December 9, I took Katya, my friend, Annette, and Katya’s friend, Megan, to visit Katya’s family. We drove three hours to Olya and Alosha’s house. Olya is Katya’s 20 year old sister. We got stopped by police two different times – a common occurrence in Ukraine. The police are hoping for bribes, but my foreign documents and difficulty with language are a discouragement to them. They sent us on our way. We spent

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## Training Future Youth Ministry Professors

- From Mike

This fall semester we have taught six college courses in youth ministry at the seminary, and I have personally taught three of these courses. The last course I taught was to



Mike teaches YM 403: Professional Orientation to Youth Ministry. Pictured from Left to Right: Radik, Natasha Bochko (Mike’s new assistant), Mike, Vladimir, Vasya, Ivan, and Andre.

our senior guys entitled Professional Orientation to Youth Ministry. Its goal is to prepare them for leadership and to be the future youth ministry professors in Ukraine. Six young men are currently scheduled to graduate in May. During the course, the students prepare portfolios, resumes, personal doctrinal statements, and participate in a mock interview to be the next youth ministry teacher at a Bible College. (There are currently 60 Bible Institutes in Ukraine.) During the interview, each student is asked for their assessment of youth ministry in Ukraine and their vision for the future. Radik, a youth pastor from Poltava who is responsible for 70 churches’ youth leaders, said this: “The problem in Ukraine is that we do not have enough TRAINED youth leaders. Youth leaders often do just what they can—without thinking or planning. If they could receive the kind of education I have received here or even half as much, they would be so much more effective in reaching this generation for Christ. We need this kind of training in all regions of Ukraine, not just in Kyiv.” Ivan, a youth pastor from Uzhgorod in Western Ukraine, said, “There is not a healthy atmosphere for youth ministry here, because there are not enough educational opportunities in Ukraine.” This is why we are not focusing on just training youth leaders in Ukraine, but we are preparing the future youth ministry professors. Please pray for us as we work hard towards this goal.

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## Rural Adventure – A Visit to Katya’s Family



Katya's family serving us a meal in Nadia's home.

(continued) some time at Olya's house, especially enjoying 2 year old Yulia, who is learning to talk. She was excited to see us and was not shy.

We got back in the van and traveled a short distance to Nadia and Vitalik's house. Nadia is Katya's 22 year old sister, and this was the first time she had invited us to her home. Olya and family came along to show us the way. Nadia and Vitalik have a one year old baby girl, Vika. Katya was excited for Megan to meet her little nieces. Nadia's mother-in-law was there, and they had prepared a meal. We crowded around the camper-sized table set with tiny, plastic plates that resembled my childhood play dishes. We enjoyed the homegrown tastes of the village – boiled potatoes with no toppings or salt or pepper, pickled tomatoes, two kinds of pickled mushrooms gathered in the forest, cabbage preserved with vinegar and oil, brown bread without butter, salami, “salo” (raw bacon fat), homemade raspberry compote (the liquid from forest raspberries that have been boiled with water and sugar to make a delicious, canned juice), homemade cherry wine or vodka for those that wanted it, and canned cherries from the forest for dessert. Nadia's mother-in-law begged us to come back in the summer when they can serve a feast of *fresh* vegetables and fruit from the garden and surrounding forest.

After lunch, we said our goodbyes and headed back to Kiev, still planning to visit Katya's mother, Tanya, on the way. She lives an hour closer to us than Olya and Nadia do. It grew dark and very foggy, and we missed the exit off the main road to Tanya's house. We turned back and were straining to locate the turnoff when suddenly, out of the darkness and fog, a large truck tire loomed directly ahead. It was lying in the center of our lane, and I had no time to react. I ran right over it. It took some paint off the front bumper of the van, but it seemed that nothing else was hurt.

We were shaken up, but we proceeded. We located the first turn and overshot yet another. Tanya's village is not marked by any road signs. I was traveling by memory of when Olya had shown my mom and me the way in May. After finally locating Tanya's village, we needed to continue on a tire track across the prairie to her cabin. The lights of our van pierced only a few feet of the foggy darkness, and it was raining slightly. Puddles were forming. We dodged the puddles, and I got out of the van once to be sure the ground was frozen. We did NOT want to get stuck! After making our way a couple miles across the prairie, we saw bigger puddles ahead and decided to quit. Tanya's house had to be near, but we couldn't see the lay of the land, and there were no cabin lights in view anywhere. We turned the van around – and our wheels began to spin. I immediately put the van in reverse. Spin. Oh NO!



Katya with her two nieces, Yulia and Vika.

Being a rancher's daughter, I knew better than to spin my wheels in the mud. I got out, and Annette took the wheel. She drove, I pushed, but we were truly stuck. I looked up. We were in the middle of Ukrainian prairie in the pitch darkness. I felt like such a foreigner in that moment. What should we do? There was no cell phone coverage. Would we be able to find someone who owned a vehicle in the village, or would a horse do the job? And then there was the matter of language. Ugh! There is always the matter of language. In rural Ukraine, people speak their own dialect — a mixture of Ukrainian and Russian. “Lord,” I whispered, “please help us!”

We tried one more time. I pushed with all my might. No progress. Annette put the van in reverse, then tried forward again. I pushed. Slowly, ever so slowly, we inched forward. Suddenly, the wheels caught and we were free! “Oh, thank you, Lord!”

We could not get off that prairie fast enough! We lost our way one more time on the way home, and a trucker had me follow him to the right road. After dropping Annette and Megan off at their houses in Kiev, Katya and I got pulled over by police a third and final time. We were SO relieved to finally pull into our apartment parking lot and turn off the van. We were home – safe and sound!

Getting lost, picked up by police, running over truck tires, and getting stuck in a pasture in a foreign country are a series of small trials, yet the Lord was and *is* with us every minute. As believers, we have the Lord to guide and protect us through any trial that touches us. “Thanks be to God, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Jesus did this for us – so that we could be His very own children. May we worship the Lord with all of our hearts this Christmas season. It is our prayer that you will be richly blessed this year in His love and care. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!