



those sweaters that they put right on. The frosts in Ukraine will last for several months and your clothes will be keeping people warmer and remind them of your warm hearts. With the money you provided we helped all our widows in church to buy some coal, we were able to buy some medicine for the people in church, food for especially needy families and give some food to kids from the Boarding school who came for the evening Bible class to our church. I am also grateful for providing some money to repair the roof of our church building and the roofs of several other Christians' houses. My car that used for the church needs was broken and needed several new parts and repair. I was very glad I was able to have it running again and ready for our American missionaries to use. I am very grateful to all the missionaries who come to Ukraine as those sent by God. I learn a lot from them, they are devoting their time, their resources and their life to God, and to people. They teach the Bible, help people in need and show the goodness of God with their great service. Thank you very much, dear brothers and sisters, for supporting the missionaries and those who serve God with their lives, with their heart, mind and soul. Yuriy Yenatskyy.

In Dzerzhinsk, I asked several people whether they felt the living conditions had improved any. I had heard that widows' pensions had been increased as a part of the run up to the presidential election. I was told that, yes, the pensions were increased, but immediately prices increased to wipe out any gain. Nevertheless, several people told me they felt circumstances had eased somewhat. So far, the weather had not been too severe and that the demand for heat was not as great as in most years. When I asked school officials about the situation, I found that the answer depended on the part of the city I was in. Where a mine has closed and nearly everyone is unemployed, there was no good news. However, when I went to a school in the center of the city, the gloom was not so obvious.

Here is a rundown of the interviews I had with Dzerzhinsk school directors. At school #10, Tatiyana is the director. She has been there several years and has hosted a Bible camp for the past 3 years. She believes that the overall economic condition of the city has improved somewhat over the past couple of years. At her school, eligibility for free lunches is determined by a parents' committee in each class. On a typical day, 700 children attend school. Parents provide funds for 151 to buy their lunches, 9 are offered lunch at government expense, and 152 are fed at church expense. In addition, 78 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> graders are provided milk in the morning. The menu for each day is reviewed by the school nurse and the school director to make sure it conforms to dietary standards. She said that Vera, the person in charge of the meals city-wide, is quite responsible and provides very nutritious meals. Tatiyana begged us to help them with getting some up-to-date teachers' manuals. She described the kinds of texts and manuals they are using (mostly from the Soviet era). I agreed to help her buy \$60 worth of supplies. Tatiyana is very impressed with the results of the camps and even came the following Sunday to express her thanks to the whole church. At that time she offered to have a weekly Bible class at her school. Victor quickly accepted her invitation and they began making plans to start the class.

At School #15, Valentina is the new director. She said that lawlessness still prevails in the community. Contributors to this are severe hunger and exposure to cold that the children experience. Each child's home was visited earlier in the fall by a special parents' committee (including a member of the church) who made an assessment of the socioeconomic conditions of each family. Most of the families have no coal for cooking and heating and there is little or no food in the house. Consequently, the children forage for food and for anything they can find (or steal) to sell in order to buy food. She has grades K-9, with a total of 120 enrolled. Twenty of these children are in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades and they get a breakfast of milk and bread every morning. They and 80 of the other children receive lunch. At the end of the day, there are 15 children who stay at school and receive tea or coffee and cake. The director said that as a result of the food we provide there is better school attendance and less crime among the children. This

food is provided by concerned American Christians such as you. Valentina also said that many of the children need shoes, boots, socks and other clothing.

When I visited School #13, I talked with the director, Vladimir, who has been there for several years. He reported on much the same things I had heard at School #15. In his school there are 313 students, distributed across grades 1-11. A full meal is provided to 72 of these children, plus 45 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> graders get milk and bread. He said that he sensed a slight improvement in the economic situation in his district because a few more of the parents are paying for their children to have meals at school. He made a request for us to offer a camp at his school, perhaps a weekend mini-camp (my way of expressing it). Obviously, any expansion of our Bible camps commitment would require that we have at least 30 American teachers on our team next summer.

At school #14 I was unable to meet with Valentina, the director, because she was in the hospital. The teacher who talked with me said that the 60 children who are being fed by the church are most grateful, as are their families. She believes that there are several children not on the eligible list who need to be fed. (Probably the same could be said for most of the schools.)

At the Boarding School, I met with the Director and her assistant. They are responsible for 400 children, including 100 orphans. She expressed concern that we might not send a team to conduct a Bible camp next summer. She said the children had heard that we were worried about increased costs and the threats of terrorism. I said that those were certainly factors that affected our plans but that we were planning to return next summer if it were agreeable with her to host a camp. She reiterated her desire that we come again. She said that the children especially appreciated the sports and the crafts. In fact, she said that her children were much better behaved when they were participating in the camp than they normally were. I told her we were tentatively planning to come to conduct the camp June 27-July 1, 2005. She said it would probably be better to come a week earlier. I asked her what we could do to help the children between now and next summer. She explained that there were 35 children who were true orphans, that is, they were at the boarding school "24/7." Whereas most of the children could go on weekends to stay with (usually) distant relatives, these 35 had absolutely no place to go. She asked if we could supplement their diet by adding 50 kopeks (10 cents) to their daily food allotment for Saturdays and Sundays. This would enable the kitchen to supply some cheese and sausage above the basic diet. I told her I would let her know and a couple of days later I sent word that we would do it.

The big news from this trip is that we baptized two precious souls into Christ. Vladimir and his wife Elena had begun attending our evening Bible class for adults during the Bible Camp at School #10 last summer. They started coming because their grandson had come home praising the teaching and activities he was experiencing during this day camp. They admit that they were somewhat skeptical of the big effort being mounted by the American Christians. They had visited many churches, looking for a church that not only claimed to follow the New Testament, but also practiced its teachings. I've never had a person ask as many questions as Vladimir did during those summer classes. In fact, most of the questions I included in my report last summer were ones that he had raised. During the months following the summer classes, Vladimir and his wife attended the church regularly and had Bible studies with Victor Samoylov (the preacher for the Dzerzhinsk church). When I arrived at Dzerzhinsk last month, almost the first news was that Vladimir and his wife were ready to be baptized. I had an opportunity to talk with them both for a while and then I was pleased to baptize them that very day. I have high hopes for this very committed couple as they enter into the life of the Dzerzhinsk church.

While I was on this trip I had help from Valentina, Oksana and Lydia -- three outstanding students who had volunteered as translators in our Bible camps in Dzerzhinsk. Each of them devoted several days working long hours translating for meetings, my Bible classes and sermons and protecting me from unreasonable demands of border and customs officers.

While I was gone from the USA, contributions continued to arrive. I have now gone through all my mail and answered most of it. I am humbled by the response we received from the report I sent out just before I went to Russia and Ukraine. The contributions that have arrived are sufficient not only for continuing the feeding of children and caring for the widows until my next trip (probably March), but also through the rest of the school year. My deepest thanks to all of you for your prayers and your contributions of funds to help the destitute people in Dzerzhinsk!

Unless I've lost count, this was my 35<sup>th</sup> trip to Russia and Ukraine. The first time (1990) I went and preached in a small church in the city of Slavyansk, Donetsk region, Ukraine when it was still a republic of the Soviet Union. Very possibly that Church was one of the first Churches of Christ in that country. Next year (1991) the wall separating East and West Germany was broken and the doors for hundreds of American missionaries were open. Many new churches were born in different cities of the USSR, the country that does not exist any longer. Thanks to the support of thousands of American Christians the word of God continues to touch the hearts of the lost in many republics of the former USSR that became independent countries. Just in Donetsk, Ukraine, there are more than 20 Churches of Christ!

I am deeply grateful to God for giving me the opportunity to be a part of this Mission. I am also deeply grateful to all of you my dear family and friends, my brothers and sisters all over the USA, who have been supporting me in my work for 14 years. During this Holiday Season let me wish you a wonderful peaceful time with your families and friends. May your hearts be content, may your spirits be light and all your holiday memories bright!

Love in Christ,

Bill Wharton

These letters of children are addressed to all of you. I know they will touch you as they touch me and keep me going.

I am Denis Voloshin, I am in the 10th grade at school #10. I want to express my gratitude to the members of the Church of Christ for sincere love and concern for us. I don't have a dad, he passed away a long time ago. I was very young then. My mother takes care of me by herself. She has **very poor vision**. Right now she has a part time job at the mine. I try to help her at home and in the garden, where we grow vegetables, this really helps us, we can stretch mom's salary for the food longer than 2 weeks. Thank you so much for feeding me and so many other children in our school. I know some kids have a worse situation than mine and you save them from starvation. I am so thankful that I can depend on a good meal at school. Thank you so much to everyone who has looked beyond their personal struggles and desires and shares generously with the schoolchildren in Dzerzhinsk. I started attending classes at the Church of Christ, and I like it there. Once again, thank you for your help and kindness,  
Denis Voloshin

Dear Church of Christ brothers and sisters, My name is Yulia Kazakova, I am 14 years old. I live with my grandparents. My mom lives in a village in Belorussia, besides me she has 3 more children (younger than I) and it is very difficult for her to raise us all since our dad passed away. It is difficult for me to live without parents. I don't live with mom because she has many problems of her own, the school is very far from their home so my grandparents took me to live with them. The school is near by and I like it. I love my grandma, but I still miss having parents. I see my mother during summers. I try to be helpful to grandma, my granddad is often in the hospital. I am also very thankful to you for your mercy. You are so far away, yet you care so much for us. Please accept my gratitude. Yulia Kazakova

Dear American friends,

I am Igor Myasnikov's mother. He is in the 7th grade at school 10. I am so grateful to you for your kindness towards the children of our school. My son attended the summer Bible camp sponsored by the Church of Christ where he met many new friends. My son has learned so much and everyday he would tell us about everything in great detail with great admiration. I am thankful to you for feeding the children. I can't even express how necessary and how valuable this help is to my family. Thank you once again, M.V. Myasnikova

Dear Bill Wharton and brothers and sisters in Christ, I have 2 children: son Sasha and daughter Yana, they are in the 7th grade at school #15. My husband has very poor health, so he can do only very light work, for which the pay is very low. Not long ago I had a trauma and now I am at the hospital. We are still not sure whether I will be able to walk. We get a pension of 200 grivnas [\$40] every month and that's all our income. We live in a rather small house. Kids go to the old coal mines to look for coal dust and they also pick up all the wood they can find and that's how we try to keep warm during the winter. Sometimes they go to the shut down mines and abandoned houses to look for scrap metal to sell it and get a little money for food. Your help with the meals is so important to Sasha and Yana and myself. I know that if it were not for you they would be missing much more school looking for ways to get a meal that day. Thank you for your help!

Dear Church of Christ, My name is Yulia Kuleshova. I have a younger sister in the 7th grade at school 15. Our mother has passed away, dad has pretty much left us: he doesn't stay at home, drinks a lot, doesn't work. I am a student at a technical school. I get a 40 grivna stipend [\$8] a month as a good student and 100 grivnas [\$20] for mom's pension. Since that's very little we are really trying hard to make both ends meet. We live in a little house. Winter time is especially difficult for us. We are always cold from October to April. Coal and wood are too expensive for us, so we are walking everywhere and looking for anything that would burn in our stove. Thank you very much for feeding Yana at school, I am glad she has a good meal every day. If it weren't for your help we probably wouldn't be able to buy even the simple necessities. Thank you again for your help. I am very sorry and ashamed that I am writing to you about our unhappy financial situation, but this is the bitter truth.  
Sincerely, Yulia Kuleshova

Dear Bill Wharton and Christians of Church of Christ, we live rather far from other schools in the city and happy that our school 15 accepted our 6-7 year old for the 1<sup>st</sup> grade. The school may be closed any time because of finances and not enough children. It is so good that kids started first grade here at school 15. It was also so wonderful to know that all our first-graders are getting a cup of milk and some of them are getting meals. We are very touched by the fact that the meals and milk are sponsored by Christians of Church of Christ. We are very grateful to everyone in the USA for this generosity towards our children. We are telling our first graders about your help, so that their little hearts could nurture a big gratitude for the people who are so kind to them.. Thank you very much. Parents of 1st graders.

Dear brothers and sisters of Church of Christ and Bill Wharton

I am a mother of 6, 4 of them are in school #15. I want to express my deepest gratitude for the help you give my family, for feeding my children at school and for the clothes you give us. You show your support to my family repeatedly. My husband has passed away. I can't work because there is none to take care of the chores at home and to care for the kids. We live rather poorly because the pension I get for the children is hardly enough for food alone. My kids collect scrap metal and go to help at the collective farms in order to be able to eat a little more. Thank you so much for feeding my kids, you help us to survive. This summer my son Nickoly broke his arm and we had to spend much more than we could afford for his treatment, but we are glad he is doing much better.

With gratitude, the mother of the Neskorodovs

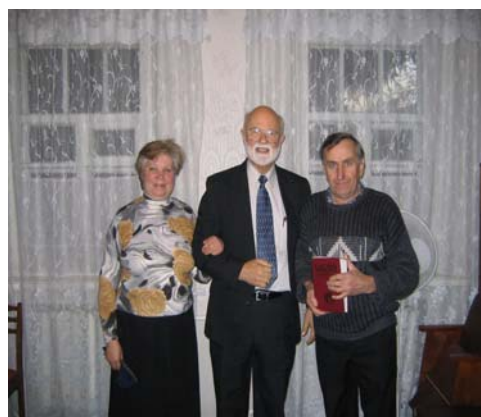
Hello, my name is Alyosha Terentev. I am in the 5th grade. I also have a sister Vika. We don't have a father. Our mother is constantly ill. We do get some money from the government but I do not know how we should spend it so we would have enough for food. It is barely enough to keep us from starving. I am very thankful for you feeding me and my little sister at school, the meals at school are very important to us - that is the only place we don't go hungry. We even get meat and fish at school, neither of which we would ever be able to afford at home. I am writing the letter myself because I know my mom is too ashamed to admit to others how poorly we live. Thank you very much for your help and kindness.  
Alyosha and Vika Terentevs

Dear Bill Wharton and members of Church of Christ,  
We have a mother, our dad has passed away. There are 2 of us children in the family. We live pretty far from school and mom doesn't have enough money to give to us to buy a meal or a snack. Mom says that because of your help, she is able to buy us winter shoes and clothes. Please accept our deepest gratitude for the meals! Natasha Gydvanska, 5th grade

Dear Bill Wharton and Christians of the Church of Christ,  
My name is Sergei Kashicin, I am in the 8th grade, my sister Nastya is in the 2nd grade. We also have a younger sister. We don't have a father and live with my mother and her boyfriend. Mom is very ill now because in the summer her boyfriend beat her. Her kidneys were badly injured. About a month ago he beat her again and now she is in the hospital. Of course, she is not able to work, so I take care of the chores at home. Thank you for feeding Nastya and me at the school. If it were not for you we would be starving. Our little sister eats only what we bring her from our lunches at school or whatever the neighbors give. I try to work for different people helping them with their yards and other things to make some money for us and for mom's medications. Sometimes mom's boyfriend takes that money away from me to buy vodka. We were offered to be put into an orphanage but we can't leave mom. Just recently our baby sister was placed to an orphanage and I go there to visit her and I go to the hospital to visit mom. Because of the meals you provide, we can put almost all the money I get towards mom's recovery. My sister Nastya also gets milk and a roll with tea during after-school. She always drinks the tea but brings the roll home. Thank you for your help. Also last year, you helped us with clothes, thank you for that as well. Sergei Kashicin



**Smiles and warm Holiday Greetings from cold Ukraine**



**New Christians and I send our greetings.**