

Classes were taught each evening for the full range of ages by Joy, Megan, Heather, Alison, Pat, Eloise, Lynn, Walter Lee, Ben and Luke; by Rich, Teresa, Dallas, Lydia and Haley Fillmon and by Leon & Marie Weeks.



Bible classes at Dzerzhinsk Boarding school

Every day we had about 200 children in attendance and we fed them all twice daily. In these day classes we were given the opportunity to teach moral lessons for living, using events from the lives of Moses, David and Jesus and from the book of Daniel. In the evening there were no limitations on the subject matter or thrust of the lessons. So we were able to teach directly from the Bible and discuss any issues that were timely and relevant to the lives of non-Christians who attended our evening classes. One evening, the American teachers presented a concert of Christian songs.



Delicious meals



Miss May and Ben's class

For the first time we had several students in the Bible Camps who were usually unable to attend school because they are considered “disabled.” In some cases their parents attended with them. We were quite impressed with the enthusiasm of both parents and children and the children’s ability to blend with the other children in the Camps. The efforts to “mainstream” these children has been headed by Larisa Potipaka, supported and encouraged by Gainesville residents, Bill and Kandy Williams.

On the final day of the Camps, we had a closing session for each Camp that gave the children an opportunity to demonstrate what they had learned during the week. They displayed a lot of talent and creativity. The last day will be remembered poignantly by our teachers and helpers because of the many smiles and tears from their children.

It is never easy to conduct a program of this magnitude in a foreign country, where conditions are so different from those we have in our country. Our team had to endure long,

unpleasant flights, long train rides, lost luggage and teaching materials, absence of running water and indoor plumbing, unfamiliar food, blisters from extensive walking, language barriers and shortage of good translators, but spirits remained high and the mission was tremendously successful. In addition, this time of the year was when the raspberries, strawberries and cherries are ripe. So the team members enjoyed picking fruit and were glad recipients of many gifts of fruit from the families in Dzerzhinsk.

We see the Bible camps in Dzerzhinsk as an important part of our overall evangelistic strategy. The children enjoy the camps immensely and are already asking about next year's camps. They learn a lot from the Bible, learn songs that tell Bible stories and lessons and, perhaps even more importantly, they get acquainted with actual Christians who are strongly committed to Jesus. Many of the children desire to continue their new-found connection with American Christians and exchange addresses for later communication. (Attached to this report is a sampling of the many letters children wrote us after they attended the camps.)

This connection with children overflows into relationships with other family members. During the week of the camps and in the following week, the adult classes were attended by parents who learned of us through their children. In these adult classes we dealt almost entirely with important spiritual questions raised by the parents. Here is a sampling of questions we were asked:

- Who is the head of the church? (Local and worldwide)
- How should church leaders conduct themselves?
- Why do you Americans come to Dzerzhinsk?
- Is the Church of Christ just one more cult in Dzerzhinsk?
- What are some of the differences between the Church of Christ and other churches?
- How can I become a Christian?
- Was it wrong to have my child baptized when he was a baby?
- What do you mean when you say, "we are led by the Holy Spirit?"
- Is it necessary for me to wear special clothing when I worship?
- Is it wrong to wear a cross on a chain around my neck?
- When must I fast?
- Why do you not use instruments in your worship?
- Can I be a faithful believer in God and not attend the church services?
- Is it a sin to kill in war?
- My husband gets drunk and abuses me and my children. How can I change him?
- How can I help my daughter quit using drugs?
- My brother is not willing to work. How can I refuse to give him food when he asks?

In the second week we were in Dzerzhinsk, we concentrated on meeting families whose children had attended a Bible camp or whom we had fed during the preceding school year.



Bible class and tea with young people



David & Angela Reed inviting poor family to church

On these visits we told the families about the church and our belief in Jesus and also delivered food and clothing, since all of these families are very poor or destitute. We also made arrangements for resuming the daily feeding of over 500 children this September when the schools reopen.

We want to thank all the team and those who sent them for their many efforts to make these Camps a great success. Without you, the mission could not have been possible. I hope every one of this year's team will want to return. We are already making a list of Christians who want to serve on the team next year. Any who are interested should contact me soon.



Bible camp participants at School # 10.

Here are some of the letters we received, mostly from children who attended the Bible Camps this year.

These two letters are from 2nd graders:

I met Melinda, Allison, Miss May, and Ben at the camp. I liked them very much. I learned that Americans are kind and easygoing people. They believe in God. I will read the Children's Bible.

I learned a lot about Jesus' life, how He helped the poor and healed the sick. I understood that if I treat people with kindness, I will be treated with kindness as well.



Outside activities of the campers

My name is Sergei Kvashenko. I am 14, I have enjoyed the camp very much and would like for everyone who was here this year to come back again. I also want Yura, our translator from last year, to come again; I would like to say hi to Mr. Greg, Ms. Pat, Lydia, Dasha, Oksana, Mr. Bill and all the translators. I have mother, father, 2 grandmas, a brother and a sister. Do you think you could make this camp last for a month instead of a week in the future? That would be so great! With love, Sergei

Dear friends, my name is Natasha. I am so grateful to you for coming to our town and organizing this camp, where I was able to interact with you and learn more about God. I have not been a believer before, but you, your lessons, your relationships made me a believer. None of the stories and examples you have given us had any cruelty, dishonesty. We spoke a lot about joy, love and sincerity. You have shown us why and how to be kind to other people, how to love them and care for them. Thank you for all the wonderful feelings you share with us. I also met many new friends at this camp. I am extremely grateful and would like to wish you success in all you do.

Our dearest friends, Thank you for coming to OUR school, for teaching about God and how to love Him, our family, friends, and others. Thank you for teaching me about forgiveness. I have never thought it was so necessary for a good life. It is obvious that you put much of your soul into each of your lessons and this makes them very interesting to all of us and to me personally. Now I want everyone to know about God and know how much He can change our lives for the better. I listened to your stories and tried to relate them to my life. I want to change my life to be more like yours, I want to learn to forgive and ask for forgiveness, I want to love like you do and to share that love with others. Thank you. This camp was good for adults and kids alike. 10th grader.

This is my third time here. I like coming here because with each time it gets better and more interesting. We do so many different and fun things here like crafts, sing songs, read and listen to stories, interact with each other. I want the Bible to become a guide for me. I have so many new and wonderful friends, learned more about God, my English got better as well. I can't believe how easy it is to talk to you, our American friends, even though our languages are so different. I can't wait to see you next year. Vlad

My name is Dasha. I am in 9th grade at school 15. I liked the camp and especially our teacher Pat and our translators. I have never heard so many stories from the Bible. Each of them touched my heart and I will never forget the lessons I learned. I want to thank everyone that came and everyone that made it possible for them to come. This was my first time here and to tell you the truth I did not really want to attend, but I think this is the best week I have ever had. I can't believe I met so many kind, sincere and loving people. If you have an opportunity to come again, please do! Sincerely, Dasha

This is my second time here at the camp. It is wonderful to be able to talk with and get to know people from another country, especially the ones that come here to make this camp such a success. I enjoy every minute here. I was given a Bible where there is so much new and interesting information. Everyday we were given some kind of a gift – thank you so much. Pat – our teacher – is incredible and tells wonderful stories. She taught us about forgiveness and how to be kind to each other. She also told us that everyone is equal in God's eyes and He loves each of us, so we should do the same. I know now that God loves me. Sincerely, Vika

My name is Yulia Zaproeva. This is my first time at the camp. I enjoyed it very much. I met many wonderful American people and had an opportunity to interact with them. They know many games and it was fun to play outside with them. They were very kind. I also would like to thank you for the meals; everything was very delicious. It makes you feel so good when someone gives you presents and attention. Thank you for everything. I hope I am able to come again next year.

Dear American friends, two of my grandchildren are 10 years old. Denis lives in Norilsk, Russia. Anna is in Donetsk, Ukraine. They come to Dzerzhinsk for a part of their summer vacation. They are always anxious about the camp and can't wait for that week to start. They like the camp very much, they like the interaction with American teachers and other children; they listen to every story told so that they can retell it to me later.

I am very pleased with the changes I have seen in them. When Denis was about to start first grade, he had difficulties with reading and he had no desire to learn. At the camp all children received "My First Bible." It is a beautiful colorful book and it interested Denis. He started to sit down and read it on his own and he was doing it with great pleasure. That Bible became his favorite book. He started first grade with very good reading skills.

Anna is always interested in what you have to say about God, she thinks and analyzes everything she hears. My grandchildren have become kinder, more thoughtful, better listeners. They have desire to do the right thing and to help others. I like to see that they are concerned whenever they see another child in need. I attribute all of these changes to the camp. This was their third time here and again they were very excited and pleased with the week. Thank you so much to all of you, my dear friends, for your kindness, diligence, and desire to help others. With much respect, grandmother, a teacher of school #10, T. A. Meleshko

I am Zhenya Klevtsov, I am in the 3rd grade at school #10. I live in Dzerzhinsk. I am very happy that you came to our school. I liked the camp very much. I liked the songs we learned and sang. It was fun to play games with you. I was delighted to meet all of you. I learned so much! I learned many new words in English. You brought us many beautiful presents. I made many crafts. I especially like the Bible you gave me. It is so bright and so colorful, and very fun to read. I liked getting to know Miss May, Sasha, Allison, Melinda and many others. I would like you to come back again, I will be very happy to see you. Thank you for everything! Good bye.

While attending the camp, I met some new friends: Mrs. Eloise, Mrs. Joy, Mrs. Judy, Luke, Melinda and many others. The girls from my class and I enjoyed teaching Melinda how to play some Ukrainian games. I liked crafts and coloring pictures during our classes. I really enjoyed the work we were doing at summer week-camp! My friends and I liked evening Bible classes as well. Most of all we enjoyed listening to all American teachers singing on Wednesday night at the school cafeteria! Thank you very much! We are looking forward to seeing you next year... Dasha Popova

Dear friends! I really enjoyed this week at the camp! You have taught us how to love and respect each other and believe in God... We've had a really cool time together playing games and singing Christian songs. You gave us a precious gift of joy and happiness. At class you were telling us many different stories and we were trying to participate in different discussions, answering questions. Everything was very interesting. Please come back again. I hope you will come back next year! Maxim

Dear American friends! You have changed our children's behavior for the better by teaching good stories from the Bible at the summer Bible Camp. My teachers, Mrs. Eloise, Mrs. Joy and Luke, helped me to become more kind and respectful to people around me. They have told me about Jesus and His generous deeds. He always helped people in need. I will also try to do so.

Luke played soccer, football and even rugby with the guys from our class. We liked it very much. Luke is a GREAT football player! I've got many wonderful presents from America! Thanks a lot!!! Please, come back! Anton

While reading the Bible I realized that the most important thing I have to do to keep good relationships with other people is just to be friendly and helpful. I promise that I'll try to be good to all people, no matter if they are older or younger than I am. Our dear American friends, you've given us a great example of how to share and help without any profit. This past week was such an awesome gift to my classmates and me. Thank You!!! God Bless you all!

While attending the school-camp this year, I have figured for myself that the life is not as bad as it seems sometimes. Life really depends a lot on our choices. I learned how to make right choices, how

to act in the difficult situations... Now I know that God is love and we have to believe in Him and trust Him because He's the only one who can help us to get through the troubles. I love you, our American teachers! Dasha Dolya

This year's program was even better than the previous one. I've learned a lot more about God! This is just unbelievable how much fun it is being at this camp!!! I can't even describe my feelings. It's never boring here. American teachers and interpreters are all very good people. They tried to give us an example of how to be kind, polite and be patient. They tried so hard to show us that there is a better way of life. I've had many happy moments at the camp! I learned to listen better, I learned how to respond to people. I learned to express my own opinion considering some questions. Good Luck to you all!
Vladimir (Vova).

Dear Mrs. Joy, Mrs. Eloise, Luke!

I'm very upset to say "good-bye" to you all. The time with you has flown away too fast! During this week of camp in our city I've learned how I should act in different situations. I've realized that my understanding of life had been positively changed. There are many people around me that really are in despair, they really need someone to pay attention to them, to help them, and this person may be no one but ME. I have to do good things without any expectation of a reward; however, my kindness will come back to me someday when I am in need. That's what usually happens when people help one another.

We have to value other people not by the way they look, but we have to try to understand people, try to see their hearts...

One of our classes was about good and bad decisions. We ourselves have to make choices in our lives. I have decided to stay away from alcohol and drugs. We have discussed many stories from the Bible where God always helps people in their good missions. I hope God will also help me to make only right choices in my life just as He helped David in one of the Bible stories we learned. Thank you very much for the wonderful week! Hope to see you next time! Sincerely, Nikita Voskoboinikov

There are no words to describe the experience and the emotions I go through every time I participate in the Bible camp in Dzerzhinsk. Each year is so different from the previous, yet so wonderful. This year I had the privilege to translate for Leon and Marie Weeks, wonderful people as well as teachers from Valdosta, GA. They were incredible, shining examples for me as well as others at the camp. Marie's dedication, patience, love and respect for the children drew everyone to her. Leon's quiet but strong presence, his acceptance of others, and desire to share his life and God's word with others was overwhelming. It was no surprise that from the very first day they established a very strong and special bond with every single person in the class.

As a translator, one gets to see the changes people go through and especially the children. I think the prime example of the positive outcomes of the camp this year was a beautiful young lady, Alya. She has cerebral palsy, but that did not detract from her knowledge and desire to learn. She literally soaked up every word she heard. Considered physically disabled by school authorities, she has not been exposed to other teenagers most of her life, so she obviously felt very uncomfortable and out of place with them during play time and during class activities. Repeatedly we tried to get her to answer questions, participate in discussions, but all was in vain. From Monday to Friday Marie and Leon taught and showed with every action what it means to love, respect, and accept others and yourself. On Wednesday Alya decided to join a group of girls in a game. Friday was the big finish and Marie asked everyone to think about what they liked and what they learned during the week spent at the camp. Everybody had already had their turn... except for Alya. She was sitting quietly with her mother, who was there for her daughter's support almost every single hour of the camp. Marie gently called on Alya, you could feel everyone's anticipation fill the room, all eyes were turned on her. And then, for the first time, Alya stood up and walked to the front. Everyone's eyes were glued to her. With much effort, trying to add clarity to her words, she told everyone how much she enjoyed her week here, how happy she was to find friends

here, and how terrified she was to come up in front of the class. She walked back with a certain sense of pride and worth that was not there before. She knew everyone was watching her with love and admiration -- and that moment will live with her forever. And if you ask me about the purpose of these camps, I will without hesitation answer that it is for Alyas, who have never had friends or felt special among others before, it is for those of us that sat in awe as that gentle girl overcame years of criticism and fear, it is for the nonbelievers that hear about God and for the first time feel His warmth on their hardened hearts. I don't know if one week will change lives; but I do know that every year it makes an impact and gives birth to a desire to change and to see hope and light in the eyes of those who attend. Natasha Yenatska



Thanks for all you're doing for people in this town, especially for the children. I had my eyes opened for some very important things here. You do a really vital work. I just can't help but admire what you do. I learned a lot during this week of Bible camp and wrote a little poem.

Pray for your dear ones,
And pray for your enemies
Without any evil thoughts
Without empty, useless words.

Don't be a hypocrite, live - don't play,
Let God lead you on your way.
Clean your heart, be sincere and pure,
And God will be with you and will keep you secure.

Don't judge people, be with those in need.
Grow in wisdom, like mustard seed.
Don't follow crowds. On your narrow road
He will be carrying a part of your load,
Believe and obey and help others to see
How joyful life is without sin.

Love your God and He'll love you too,
His footsteps will be next to yours,
Like loving father he'll walk you through
Desert heat and severe frost.

He'll protect you from danger and harm
And will rescue from evil chains.
He will carry you in His arms
When you're tired or suffer pain.

Mighty God starts the fire in our souls,
Keeps us lovingly in His sight,
Gives us chances to reach to His goals
Lets us, children, shine with the light.

- Oksana Shabus, translator