

Christian Unity Ministries:

...exists to assist and equip Christian organizations to experience Biblical unity.

...accomplishes its mission through training events, conflict intervention, and publications to churches and Christian organizations across all evangelical denominational lines, with the objective of moving brothers and sisters in Christ toward Biblical interpersonal relationships with one another.

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Lessons from the Ukraine

by
Blake Coffee



It was with much anticipation that I boarded the plane from San Antonio destined for Detroit and then Amsterdam and then Kiev, Ukraine. I was anxious to teach and to be used by God and to observe. I knew that God would teach me a great deal more than I taught anyone else. So, I went with eyes wide open to whatever God wanted me to see. I rather suspected to see some amazing things in the Ukraine and to learn a few things about the church there.

As is so often the case, God had something else in mind. Oh, He showed me plenty of wonderful things about the church in the Ukraine. I wish you could see the expectation in their eyes as they gather to hear God's Word taught. I am so grateful God gave me the privilege of seeing that! But upon reflection, I wonder if what He *really* wanted me to see more clearly is the church here in America? I wonder if the fresh, child-like approach of the Ukrainian Christians to hearing the Word of God stands in such contrast to the American church as to say more about us than about them?

The church in the Ukraine has had the freedom to worship publicly, as it pleases, for only a short time now. We in this country have had that freedom for more than two centuries. Just

I wonder if the Ukrainian Christians' child-like hearing of the Word of God stands in such contrast to us as to say more about us than it does about them?

20 years ago, while Ukrainian Christians were sneaking into the river after midnight for their baptisms, being careful not to make splashes or sounds, lest they be caught and imprisoned, we were yawning at the multitude of church services from which we could choose. While they were digging in their gardens to retrieve their Bibles for one more quick glance at scripture for the week, we were collecting dust on our Bibles sitting on our well-stocked bookshelves. While they were quietly gathering in secret places to hear

the only teacher of God's Word in their village, we were flipping our radio dials between sermons of great preachers like Chuck Swindoll, Max Lucado, and John MacArthur, and wondering why our preacher couldn't preach like that.

I think you can see where this is going. I am afraid we are in danger of losing a critical attitude here in our churches. We are losing the will to be truly changed by God's Word. The Bible, it seems to me, has taken a place on our bookshelves right next to *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, never quite becoming an instrument of true change in our lives. We sometimes listen to our preachers with a discerning ear toward polish and presentation, and perhaps have an emotional moment or two, but not with any expectation of being transformed—not with any intention of going home that day to make real changes in our thought lives or our routines as a result of what God said to us. That, it seems to me, is what we are losing. I can't help but wonder if, once we lose it, we won't have lost the very essence of Christian discipleship? May it never be! *God, teach us these lessons from our Ukrainian brothers.*

Ukrainian Churches Eager To Understand Biblical Unity

Christian Unity Ministries has never been so privileged as it was to join Open Door Missions October 17-30, teaching in a multitude of congregations in the Eastern Ukraine. Trainers and peacemakers from Unity Ministries, representatives from Open Door Missions, and deacons from First Baptist Church, Anahuac, Texas joined to form a 13-member mission team. That team divided into four smaller teams which each spent 2-3 days teaching *Five Principles of Unity* in 3-4 congregations. Immanuel Baptist Church in Luhans'k served as the host church for the entire team.

Pastors Gary Hillyard and Danny Pitts, two of the principals of Open Door Missions, make several trips each year to the Ukraine, where Hillyard was a pastor for several years. After having taught the unity material there last year, Open Door Missions invited Unity Ministries to make the trip with them in October. The opportunity to go and to teach the unity principles to Ukrainian Christians, who have enjoyed the freedom to

worship openly for only 15 years now, was simply too wonderful to forego, and the memories from this adventure will last forever.

The history is fascinating, and the countryside is beautiful, but it was the people of the Ukraine who made the most lasting impressions on the team. "Never have I seen a group of people with a stronger faith and a bigger sense of hope," recalled Dr. Ann Farris, a Killeen educator and trainer/facilitator with Christian Unity Ministries. "They have a huge capacity for loving...I am not used to being loved so quickly. That was not a response to me; that is a response of the Ukrainian people."

The consensus among the team members was that God used this adventure to teach them as much as He did to teach the Ukrainian churches. Despite some obvious and radical cultural differences, the scriptural principles of unity were as applicable in the Ukraine as they are here in the United States. "We saw that the principles and Scriptures are universal, and that people are people," reported Pete Barker, an architect from Phoenix and a trainer/facilitator with Unity Ministries. "Most importantly, we experienced first hand the Principle of the Spirit (that the Spirit of Christ himself lives in every believer). We saw it in the speed with which new relationships formed and blossomed. If the Spirit can bridge gaps of language and culture this quickly, He can certainly unify churches in a powerful way."



Ukraine Mission Team members (left to right): Warren Clark, Pete Barker, Blake Coffee, Gary Hillyard, Ann Farris, Connie Whilden, Chipper Sherman, Oras Ortego, Charlie Henry, Randy Swift, Danny Pitts, Bobby Hall, and James Morgan. Interpreter, Lena (kneeling).

Warren Clark, an attorney from Anahuac, Texas and also a UM trainer/facilitator, was especially touched by the power of God's Word on the lives of the Ukrainian Christians. "I am so impressed with the power of the message of unity and, at the same time, I am humbled that God would call me to deliver this message."

Five Principles of Unity has been translated, but not yet published, into Russian which is the primary language of this Eastern region of the Ukraine. Therefore, though a rough draft transcript of the material was left with each Ukrainian pastor, the only means of teaching the material was verbal, through interpreters. Nonetheless, it was received in every instance by Christians who were eager to understand Biblical unity and who were anxious to be transformed by it. In most

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cases, they couldn't take notes fast enough and they often couldn't stay late enough into the night to ask questions about these Biblical principles. Connie Whilden, a UM trainer/facilitator observed, "I was struck by the differences between our cultures, and their unabashed passion for the Word of God."

Warren Clark's team had a particularly remarkable experience. On the third night of teaching, Warren noticed his interpreter had stopped interpreting. He looked over at her and she was "soaked with her own tears" and struggling to talk. "She told me she finally understood what we were saying," said Warren. At that moment, in a church culture known for its lack of expression and for its fear of anything "charismatic", a few church members began crying and praying out loud. Then others joined them. Church members were heard confessing to one another and praying spontaneously. Warren Clark observed, "That body of believers was brought to Biblical unity in one moment. What an incredible moment!"

The evidence of God's hand on this venture was overwhelming. Clearly, He is working among Ukrainian Christians, and He is using *Five Principles of Unity* in that work. In response to this, Christian Unity Ministries is now making arrangements to have this material published in Russian by a Ukrainian publisher. Please pray for this effort, as Christian Unity Ministries has made this commitment without knowing where the funds will come from for it, but knowing that God will provide them. To Him be the glory!

Peacemaker's Network To Launch in January

But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes the life of one of them... I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood.
Ezekiel 33:6

Are you a watchman, a peacemaker among God's people? In January, 2005, Christian Unity Ministries will launch it's new structure for developing peacemakers around the world. We are both excited and humbled by the opportunity God has given us to recognize Christians whom God has chosen as peacemakers and to train and equip them in that role.

Purpose: ...to mobilize the peacemakers God has for His church.

Vision: God is gifting and raising up peacemakers from among His people. Peacemakers' Network is an expanding, global network of those peacemakers, equipping and encouraging one another in Christ through a system of

- Studying God's Word and
- Personal accountability.

Calling: Pray, and join this network!



Christian Unity Ministries
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How Your Church Can Partner With Christian Unity Ministries

God is at work, restoring health and unity to His church. Christian Unity Ministries has joined that work, bringing His message of Biblical interpersonal relationships and Christian community to local congregations. We do this through a multi-piece training program aimed at various aspects of church life.

God has begun to call churches to partner with us in this effort—churches who not only are intentional about their own health, but who also feel a responsibility for contributing to the health of other local congregations.

Would you pray, and seek to know whether YOUR church is called to be a partnering church with Christian Unity Ministries?

For more information, contact us at:

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BECOMING A PARTNERING CHURCH WITH CHRISTIAN UNITY MINISTRIES

*Our **Partnering churches** are intentional about preserving the unity of the Spirit in their own congregation and receive all of our training at significantly reduced costs. They partner with us in each of the following ways:*

- *Regular monthly financial support in any amount;*
- *Being proactive about sharing testimony with other churches' leadership about this ministry;*
- *Sending their pastor or other designated representative to the Unity Ministries Annual Conference in San Antonio.*

*Join us in equipping God's people for unity. **Be a part of what God is doing!***