

Reaching Ukrainians

This is a collection and summary of information provided by missionaries to Ukraine.

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The group of immigrants [in our area] began from a small number and then everyone in their family came followed by everyone from all the extended families. This was how it was done years ago although a large group immigrated in the 90's. That open door policy of our State Department in the early 90's changed, how-ever, and made it more difficult for the general populace to come. The Christians that came here probably had some sort of "persecution" tag on their resume in order for them to be allowed in.

Some areas [in Ukraine] are **ultra conservative** and the Christians from there will have a hard time accepting women wearing pants, makeup, etc. that we Americans have accepted for generations. Exposure to our ways and getting to know our hearts usually overcome these issues though.

[Regarding ministries to reach out to them:] Not sure about what it would look like but anything that would help them earn money. **ESL is the best thing possible** but are there other trainings that you have people with expertise that could train those who want to learn it? (A trade for example.)

Since Ukrainians are very relational, they respond to the Gospel more so when people share time with them relationally instead of a one-time witnessing opportunity. This can be done through free cooking classes, ESL, block parties, guitar lessons, fishing clubs, teaching American sports, etc. **that also offer a Bible study. That way you get to see them on a regular basis and they begin to trust your honesty and their love for them to know Christ.**

When we have volunteer teams come [to Ukraine] and they are preparing to give testimonies or witness we instruct them to be sure to **emphasize the personal aspect of God and His desire to have a relationship with people. In Western Ukraine the people are generally very religious and the average person on the street knows quite a lot about religious ideas and the Bible but it is only facts and culture.** On Easter everyone greets each other on the street with "Christ is Risen!" But most often this knowledge is in their mind like the dry facts of physics – the earth is round, gravity is 32.2 ft per second squared, Jesus is the Son of God and died on the cross for my sins –. Also **their culture is very religious.** It is quite Ukrainian to find people praying at the statues of Mary that we have all over our city, lots of Ukrainians cross themselves (either the Catholic way or the Orthodox way) whenever they pass by a church. **But it is not as heart felt as it is culturally required.**

But if you ask them what they have learned from reading the Bible lately, you will get a blank stare for an

answer. If you ask them what God has said to them recently they will look at you with confusion. It is my opinion that **they need to understand that God is really real, and that He wants to have a loving relationship with people.** This is why we ask people to **talk about how God is leading them and how He shows His love to them. If they hear how God is inter-acting with others maybe they will choose this for themselves.**

Another important thing is that **Ukrainians are often very polite but also very suspicious.** In other words it might be easy to become an acquaintance of theirs but it **will be hard to become their friend. And they might not believe you when you talk about how God is real if you haven't won their trust.** So, lots of time must be spent in **developing relationships with them so that they will listen to you.** Unfortunately we have found them to be relatively slow in coming to the truth, but the ones that come to Christ in repentance generally have a great faith that will endure hardships and persecution.

Ukrainians are not at all afraid to pray. If a person presents the four spiritual laws or some other tract they will agree with everything and agree to say the prayer at the end. But they might not realize that this was different than the "Hail Mary's" the priest tells them to pray.

Once I had some Americans visiting and we were driving down the road to see the countryside. When we saw some farmers plowing their field with a horse, they wanted to stop. We stopped and struck up a conversation with the Ukrainians. After a while the American told me to ask them if we could talk about God. When I asked they responded, "We are Ukrainians, we are standing here, the sun is shining, why not talk about God?" We discovered one of the farmers was Catholic and one was Orthodox. We went through a gospel presentation and they agreed with everything we were saying. But we could not get them to understand that it was a personal relationship with God that made the difference. Sometimes I am perplexed at how much they know but yet they don't understand.

A person relationship with God must be stressed with personal examples of how God is actively involved in guiding the Christians life.

It seems that the Ukrainian pastors and teachers that I have met lack the training of exegetical preaching and teaching. Maybe the association could offer some **free seminars by local pastors in exegetical preaching and teaching.** Also it could help to have **seminars on how to start and lead a Bible study** (direct and indirect).