



Thirty Years Going!

Watkins June 2023 Update

This month marks thirty years since we moved to L'viv, Ukraine, as missionaries. I took my first trip to Moscow during the final years of the Soviet Union in 1989 to study advanced Russian, and I went on scouting trips to Russia or Ukraine every year until our move in 1993. After Moscow, Tom Jackson and I trekked from Berlin to L'viv with suitcases bursting at the seams with Bibles. The next trip was with Myra to L'viv and then Moscow by train to scout out a potential church plant during a bitterly cold winter.

All roads eventually led to L'viv because we had made friends there on previous trips. My final scouting trip to L'viv before our move was with Jeff Bullock. I mention my friends because we all went on to plant elsewhere. Tom planted in Scotland, and Jeff planted in Poland. Fast-forward thirty years, and we are planting in Prague.



March 1993 with Abigail. We had one of the only baby backpacks so people on the trams were looking at us. Becca would complete our quartet in two more years.



Hennady and I preparing for our first church services. We purchased one of the only two overhead projectors in town (I think), and I am attempting to write out the songs in Ukrainian or Russian.

Our main friend and team member in L'viv was Hennady Kovalchuk, who came from a rich heritage of pastors, some of whom had been imprisoned for the gospel. Our first team members from the US were Susan (Ward) Ridenour, Mike Little, and Mike Cook. From June to August 1993, we learned to assimilate, find food during the post-Soviet economic collapse, make many Ukrainian friends, survive sickness, wash diapers by hand (Mike), and try to find a crib for Abigail so she didn't have to sleep in our suitcase.



I am preaching to a group across from L'viv's Halytsky Market. The money changers who illegally worked here tried to turn the people against us, but it didn't work.



Jeff preaching in the old town. We had to let cars through occasionally. Almost everyone in this photo stepped forward to pray. I preached to the next group while Jeff talked with the first.

Next came our first large-scale outreach with a team from the US led by Jeff Bullock. We preached on the streets to the point of stopping traffic and had follow-up meetings in the former Museum of religion and atheism, a Dominican Church before Communism. We saw over 400 come to faith on the street, and thirty stayed with us to form the church. Through good times, persecution, and war, Christ Fellowship Church in L'viv remains a thriving church.

This was the beginning of it all, the "ready-shoot-aim" that landed us in Ukraine. It was an exciting time, and we will feature stories from the early days in our following updates. And we are still GOING!



One of our initial follow-up meetings. Many young people!



Our first outreach team in August 1993.



One of our first home groups with visiting pastor Mike Williams. Mike led me to Jesus and disciplined me.



Small groups continued to grow, and we were joined by Christian international students from Ghana, Nigeria, Mexico, and India. They were the unexpected team that God gave us.

Fast-forward to now; Myra and I just returned to the US from three very busy months in Prague, where we are planting a new church. Our main reason for returning is that we must

complete our Czech visa applications at the embassy in Chicago. Additionally, I will serve at our church planter's assessment center in July, and I have a seminary intensive at Asbury in August. The highlight of the summer will be Abigail and Josh's wedding in September. If all goes as planned, we will return to Prague in early October.



Our team ministering at several Chernobyl children's hospitals and camps. 1993 was only seven years after the nuclear catastrophe that affected a whole generation of children, and we were thankful that Hennady was able to get us into these facilities.



Our team members ministering at one of the camps. The gospel of the kingdom urges us to minister to spiritual and physical needs, and we continue to teach social responsibility to the next generation of planters and campus ministers.

Myra just finished developing a course on Social Responsibility for our global ministry, which will come out soon, and one of her papers was included in a recent book published by Asbury. She also contributes to various academic study groups and journals as she begins her third and final year of coursework for her Ph.D. She will write her dissertation after the comprehensive exam in a year.

Our hearts remain full of faith, hope, and love as we continue what we began in 1993. Thank you for standing with us on this journey. Mike & Myra

Join Our Partnership Team!

Mail support to:

Global Impact Resources
Attn: Mike & Myra Watkins
P.O. Box 3012 Greenville, NC 27836

Note: Michael Watkins acct# 101

Contact

cell: 919-348-3884

mike.watkins@everynation.org

Prayer Requests

1. Peace for Ukraine and continued resources for refugee relief
 2. New monthly partnerships for our work in Europe
 3. Mike's health: continued energy for this busy ministry season
 4. New team members and expedited visas for the Czech Republic
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