

## LEARNING ABOUT JESUS IN UKRAINE

“We rejoice that some Ukrainian campers made first time commitments to follow Christ, and several expressed interest in joining English and Bible clubs that meet regularly in the area,” ACCTS staff member Russ Hammerud shares after this July’s English camp in Ukraine. The program provided English and Bible classes for about 40 Ukrainian teenage and preteen military dependents and was led by Ukrainian military Christian fellowship members and volunteers, along with ACCTS staff members and volunteers.

ACCTS’ deputy director Bernhard Kaltenbach, who was a teacher at the camp, states, “At first the teenagers didn’t seem interested in Christ or Christianity. Many had little knowledge of Jesus, although they may have gone to church a few times with grandparents. But by the end of the program, several had questions about Christ and were interested in Him. The combined US/Ukraine leadership team showed them Christian love in very practical ways and were sincerely concerned for their well-being, especially their spiritual well-being.”

Each morning began with exercise and the raising of the Ukrainian and US flags. There were different themes for each day, such as “God, Who is He?” “True Happiness,” “What you Sow is What You Reap,” and “Major Life Decision-Making.” The morning worship programs, in the Ukrainian language, and presentations by the US team, in English, centered on each day’s theme.

Daily activities included English and Bible classes, with ample time in the schedule for sports such as hockey; games like Capture the Flag and table games; and crafts such as jewelry-making and painting.

After dinner, there was a sermon by a local pastor, followed by games, testimonies, and a campfire. An “American Night” and a “Ukrainian Night” about the traditions, cultures, and holidays of each nation were especially popular, and Bernhard comments, “My sense from the Ukrainian Night was that there is still a strong belief in the importance of family in the nation. I especially noticed the importance of grandparents and extended family in the kids’ presentations and discussions.”

The Ukrainian leadership team was extremely well-organized and well-led, Bernhard also reports. They used their own personal vacation time to help teach at the camp and showed true servant-leadership to the campers and the US team.

The Ukrainian group included Christian adult counselors and teenagers who befriended and helped the campers. “During one of the classes, a counselor and camper came in very late,” staff member Cheryl Kaltenbach shares. “The adult counselor later explained that the teen had some serious questions and she’d spent over an hour talking with the young girl and helping her work through her questions. The counselors did a great job of reaching the campers at their level and helping them spiritually and emotionally.”

Bernhard and the camp leader, Roman, talked about ACCTS’ leadership training programs, and Roman is interested in not only participating in some of ACCTS’ programs but developing similar programs in Ukraine for their MCF members. Additionally, Bernhard reports that “many of the campers asked us to stay in touch with them. We will stay in contact with them through emails and Skype, and I reminded them that even if they weren’t comfortable asking us faith questions during the program, we are always available to help them with those questions. The Ukrainian team members have already started following up with the participants, so I know they will help this program have a longer lasting impact than just the week of camp itself.”

We’re thankful that God used this camp in the lives of the participants and as a way to help the Ukrainian military Christian fellowship reach out to military personnel and their families. In the European job market, English language is a critical skill and the English classes will help participants in their future lives. More importantly, we believe that God will continue to use the camp to develop the spiritual lives of participants and draw them closer to following Jesus.

*Please pray for eternal fruit in the lives of campers and transformed lives from the ongoing expressions of love, truth, fellowship, and discipleship. Pray also that the teens’ parents would be moved to greater involvement in MCF activities such as Bible fellowship groups.*