



**Ventzislav and Zlatina
Karavaltchevi**

With Stefan and Iva
CMS mission partners
(Ukraine)

Link Letter no. 9 March 2010

Dear friends,

Christ is risen!

Warm Easter greetings from Kiev dear friends.

After the Siberian cold winter we had here for about three months, Christ's resurrection is bringing not just joy and the salvation message to the world, but also warm weather. We can really experience the words of King David – that the whole nature *"proclaims the glory of God"* (Psalm 18:1).

The whole of our family is waiting impatiently to enter into the joy of the Ecumenical church. Kids are counting down the hours before they can start Easter eggs fighting. This year they are very proud because, without any intervention from us, they took a decision to fast for a week. That is something we really appreciate, as what could be a greater wish for the parents but one day facing our Lord Jesus Christ and declaring: *"Here we are, and the children You gave to us."*

Our work is also taking off. It is still early to collect the first fruits, but the way our missionary activities are developing

gives us much courage. But please do pray for us and our work here, as new challenges are coming and as you will see, we will need greater support and even "miracles" to be able to bring to a particular end our work in Ukraine.

Ventzy writes...

Dear friends, our major effort in Ukraine – to establish a new independent theological higher educational institution – is already a fact. The Theological Institute of St Andrews started functioning from 1 of September. A few months ago, I was appointed to the position of Executive Director of the Institute. Currently we have 16 students – three layman, three deacons, seven priests and three bishops.

For me it is a real success, as you probably remember how difficult the beginning was. What makes me even happier is the fact that we have brought together clergy from two of the three existing Orthodox churches in Ukraine, which previously were not in communion. So we are offering not just education but a place for sincere dialogue and friendship. Our aim is to bring students in from the third Ukrainian Orthodox Church – that of Patriarch Philaret, who for now is refusing to enter into any dialogue with the rest of the churches.



Our parish in Kiev

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Iva at school

Our Institute now has six teachers and we are expecting a few more to join. Half of our staff is from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) and half from the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church of Metropolitan Methodius. The programme we run now is for the degree of BA and MA. Our aim is for the near future to be able to offer a PhD degree. One of my responsibilities at the Institute is to supervise four students through the dissertation process. I am also giving lectures in Church History, Historical Liturgics and Patristics. I am also leading seminars on Inter-religious dialogue and Missiology – stressing the importance of mission in and among “Sunday Christians”, atheists, Muslims etc. The seminars are open to the wider public and not limited only to our students and academic staff.

My responsibilities include enabling the smooth functioning of the academic structure. I am also an editor and adviser for publications coming out of the Theological institute. We have managed to prepare the first volume of our new theological magazine – containing some 250-300 pages of academic articles written by our teaching staff. We hope in the forthcoming weeks to pay the bill from the publishing house and to start distributing the volume to bookstores.

We are also in the process of setting up our own newspaper: Zlatina is going to be responsible technically for the newspaper articles. In addition, our new website is almost ready and we hope very soon to be able to send you a link. It has a new, reader-friendly design and will cover news, events, articles from our academic life, but also with its previous focus on mission and dialogue.

We have also been asked by our supervisor – Father Petro Zuev – to take care of “Sunday religious school” in our parish. In the parish we have some 100-150 people, most of them young couples with two-three children. Therefore we have to prepare for teaching religion to some 40-60 children.

Zlatina writes...

Dear friends, we have begun several projects this year and we hope with God’s help to be able to complete them. The first one is educational and I am working on it with a couple of friends from Bulgaria and Ukraine. We started preparing PowerPoint presentations for religious classes in primary and secondary schools, and for church Sunday schools. It is quite pioneering work, because until now in most of the post-communist countries there are no computer programmes for religious education. Religious teachers need to improvise and success is based mainly on the enthusiasm and computer skills of each teacher. The need for proper, quality religious lessons is great.

Our lessons are even attracting teenage interest, something very difficult to achieve nowadays. Together with our Ukrainian friends, we are translating texts for the needs of the local (Ukrainian) churches in which we have some 70-80 per cent young people. Our ultimate aim is for all presentations, together with methodological explanations for the teachers and all additional materials, to be published on CD and/or DVD format and to be accessed by as many people as possible.

Up to now we have prepared three lessons – for the celebration of “*Presentation of Christ*” (Luke 2:22-40) on 2 February; for all the Sunday celebrations during the great Easter lent; and for the meaning of the fast and fasting in Christianity. <http://www.dveri.bg/content/view/10871/186/> I am responsible for the content and text of the lesson, for the PowerPoint presentation and for uploading the lesson onto the Bulgarian church website (see link below). After Venty and Father Petro are ready with the new Ukrainian website, there should be a special place for our lessons as well.

I am also part of the team working on a pioneering project aiming to grasp the attention of teenagers. We are preparing for publication two albums with cartoons on religious topics: <http://www.dveri.bg/content/blogcategory/157/502> and we hope, with a provocative sense of humour, to look at our spiritual life and to give a different view on our relationship with God. Most of the cartoons are inspired by the writings of Jean de La Fontaine, but we are changing the context in order to accommodate them into a modern life setting. The author of the cartoons is a famous Bulgarian priest.

The website for Christian dialogue of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow patriarchate) which we are also responsible for is in the process of being upgraded and reconstructed. We expect to be shortly linked to the official website of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

With Ventzy, we are mainly responsible for the searching and translation into Russian of important materials and news about inter-religious dialogue, and dialogue between different Christian denominations. Part of the Ukrainian team we are working with are former drug addicts, who managed to free themselves through the help of Jesus Christ. Father Petro Zuev, who is behind the project and the major brains of it, managed to secure for them some regular payment – it helps them to cover their basic needs and ensure that they will not return to drugs.

The parish of Father Petro of which we became part is quite big, interesting and unusual. It is not a secret that today Christianity has become the religion of an elder generation. Younger people are not paying much attention to the call of their hearts. But, in Father Petro's parish of St Catherine, everything is different. We have some 100-150 active members of the parish and less than 10 per cent of them are above 50 years old. In the parish we have about 50-60 children up to the age of seven – including Stefan and Iva. And this is given the fact that the normal church building was confiscated a couple of years ago by the ex-president of the country V. Jushchenko, and now the congregation gather in a large flat some 10 miles away from their former church.

It is a real miracle how they survived as a parish through the years – and not just survived, but significantly increased in numbers. It might be interesting to know that the flat where Father Petro's parish is accommodated now was purchased through a generous gift made by the president of Russia Vladimir Putin. When Jushchenko confiscated their previous church, they gathered as a church on the streets for couple of months. But when winter approached it was impossible to continue and somebody suggested writing to Vladimir Putin. What a surprise then, when a few weeks later they received a cheque for \$80,000. Now within the flat they have not only a church but also a museum of clergy martyrs, who were killed during the time of communism.

Stefan and Iva

After a quite difficult period, our children Stefan (almost eight) and Iva (almost six) are finally managing to adapt and make friends. With the help of God and thanks to the prayers of many of you,

we managed to enroll Stefan in the only appropriate school available to him – a Russian language school. For several months Stefan was struggling with the Russian language, but thankfully he succeeded and now is enjoying the benefits of his schooling with new friends and quite good study results. For the second time in his life, he is facing such a challenge, starting everything from zero – a new school, a new language, new people. He is a joyful boy, but several times we noticed that he sits quietly and sadness could be read in his eyes. When asked what has happened, his answer is *"nothing in particular – it's just that my heart is in pain... I am sad for myself..."*.

For several months he has been visiting a very good speech therapist here in Kiev. His speech became much clearer and stammering appears only when he is very tired or confused. But despite the positive results, his therapy still needs to continue. We hope and pray that one day all his speech problems will be over. The speech therapist believes that all his speech problems are reversible; he just need proper therapy to continue. He has joined his swimming and aikido groups again, after three months break because of the extremely cold winter. He seems to be happier now, because sport keeps him busy and helps him meet other kids.

Iva, our tiny princess, continues to bring us joy through her happy smiles. For us it is a great relief, especially after she suffered a short winter period of "kid's depression" during which she was sad, feeling lonely, isolated, and used to cry often. The speech therapist who sees Stefan (she is a kids' psychologist as well) advised us to engage her in some group games, where speech is not necessary as Iva doesn't speak much Russian. Now she is doing modern ballet three-four

Stefan happy at school



times a week in the nearby "kids palace" and is extremely happy and proud.

A visit from Philip...

During February we were visited by our CMS personnel manager, Philip Bingham, and CMS consultant for Eastern Europe, Olga Oleinik. It was a good opportunity to welcome them to Kiev and to introduce to them to our work, projects and problems. It was also a rewarding time for sharing our experiences and worries, but Philip also brought us sad news – that the world financial crisis has greatly affected the financial stability of CMS and that their staff are facing a cut of 25 per cent.

Our personal budget is also suffering, and we were warned that we would need to find ways of covering the gap. If we didn't do so, we would not be able to complete our mission tour in Ukraine and our time in Kiev would finish at the end of the academic year, in June.

We would sincerely like to complete our terms of contract with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Our contract is for three years, up to September 2011, and that is what our host organisation would like very much to see happen. We discussed this with Philip Bingham and noted down several points where we could work on improving the situation:

- To search for local support and resources, which might cover part of the budget. We have already started a conversation with Rev Petro Zuev from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and some positive signals have been given.
- To explore possibilities for part of the project to be supported by appropriate EU or charitable fund programmes.
- We agree that if any additional finance arrives, to stop for a year the pension combinations CMS is making on our behalf and which form a significant part of our budget.

A personal appeal

We would like to ask all of you to continue to support us despite the difficulties. Please do pray for us, and in particular for an improvement in our financial situation. If you are aware of others who may be willing to support the work we do in Eastern Europe then please put them in touch with Paul Read at CMS, paul.read@cms-uk.org. We do hope very much that together, with the help of God, we will manage to overcome these difficulties and

be able to complete our mission work in Ukraine.

Prayer points

- Please pray for a successful end to our mission in Kiev; pray also for financial solutions not just for us but also for all CMS mission partners who are experiencing similar problems.
- Please pray that God might bring us new assistance and help for our projects.
- Please pray that we could help build dialogue between divided Christians in Ukraine.
- Please do pray for a Ukrainian village family with eight children who are experiencing enormous financial difficulties attempting to pay their debts. This family used to be part of our parish and now the parish is aiming to help and find a real and lasting solution for their problems.
- Please pray for our children to be able to deal with all the challenges that they are facing; especially Stefan, in successfully ending his speech therapy, and being able to fully, completely and on an equal footing communicate with his classmates.
- Pray for Ventzy, as his grandfather passed away a month ago. Pray also that his stepfather would fully recover from a brain stroke, suffered recently.
- Pray for all of us, to give us Godly wisdom and faith to know and obey His Divine will.

With all the best wishes,

Yours in Christ,

*Ventzy, Zlatina,
Stefan and Iva*