

On July 18, 2017, I had the privilege and opportunity to visit several families in Western Ukraine with Protodeacon Gabriel Petorak. Protodeacon Gabriel has been providing missionary services to our sister church, Our Lady of the Dormition, Dobranich, for approximately 19 years. When Protodeacon Gabriel first began going to Dobranich, the church didn't have any heat and people attended for short periods of time, returning home to allow other family members to attend. With the donations from St. Michael's Orthodox Church, Jermyn, there is heat, new Icons, and new windows. With the donations delivered this year, new Icons will be added behind the alter.

The homes we visited were very modest; one mother and son renting a single room in a home. The boy, Taurus, was very happy to show Icons of Jesus and the Blessed Mother as soon as we entered their room. Of all the people we met, a single thought became apparent~ we are who we are by the relationships that we make. The people we met had very little material possessions compared to what we Americans have, but, they seem to have a strong relationship with Jesus as evident by what we had the privilege of witnessing. An elderly woman appeared to look at and talk with Jesus as she was talking with us. In addition, this woman fell in her garden and walked into her modest home, then, laid on her bed until Vladimir, the Church custodian checked on her later that evening. When she was taken to the hospital, the physician stated that there was no way she could have walked to her home and had lain on the bed as she described with the way her back was broken.

Relationships impact all of us but if we put Jesus first, our crosses seem lighter. Every person we met appeared happy to see us; offering bread and what little food they had; and always refreshments. The people waste nothing, and use whatever food they have from their gardens or with the chickens they raise. I believe we have a lot to be grateful for~ Our church, our family and friends, the relationships we have with the people we encounter in our daily lives, the ability to live, worship, work, and love in a free land. I ask myself if I make the people I encounter in my life on a daily basis feel as the people in Western Ukraine made me feel, loved and welcome unconditionally, as in Corinthians 1:13.

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