



Thoughts of Faith

April 2024

Ukraine | Czech Republic | Latvia
Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Board for World Outreach

A MESSAGE

from Nicholas and Kerry Laper, Gift of Life

Dear Readers—In the February 2024 issue of the *Thoughts of Faith* newsletter you read an article written by our pro-life psychologist, Nina Andreychuk, longtime counselor with Gift of Life. The current newsletter features an article written by a new employee, Family Doctor Nataliia Mykhalyk of Medical Clinic on Wheels. Here, war fatigue creates cracks in the culture causing disillusionment with life. Living in “interesting times” is not necessarily a blessing, however; amid sorrow and uncertainty we hold to the joy of our resurrected Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We are also thankful for you, the donors, who pray for and contribute to Gift of Life—Hope to People in Need!

From the ELS

Stories of Life and Freedom

Rev. Thomas Heyn, Administrator
Board for World Outreach

“You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever” (Psa 16:11).

We have just celebrated our Savior’s victory over death and his resurrection to life. His death and resurrection make certain our freedom from the guilt of sin and the certainty of our resurrection to eternal life.

Our writers share their stories with us, stories of life and freedom. They never fail to show us the many opportunities that God gives them to share the Gospel. We hope you enjoy their stories and see that God is always at work in his Church sharing the message of life with a dying world.

We are grateful for your offerings to our Lord that help support this important work. It continues because of God’s blessings upon your gifts and prayers.

Gift of Life—Ukraine

“Gift of Life”—a Place Where Everyone Is Welcome

by Dr. Nataliia, Family Doctor

Have you ever felt that you should change something in your life? That God calls you to start doing something new? These thoughts came to my mind in the summer of 2023. I held a good position as a family doctor, I was head of an ambulatory, had a great team with more than 1800 patients, and liked my job. But I realized that the experience of seven years of work could help people who needed it more.

Then “Gift of Life” came into my life, namely a mobile clinic on wheels (MCOW). The help provided by the organization is an answer to prayers to God by Ukrainians. Now, when there is war in our country, there are many more people who are suffering physically and mentally. War has changed all of us. Unfortunately, there are few families left where no one has been killed. Everyone has their own sad story. We have lost classmates, neighbors, friends, colleagues, and relatives. In their place are constant worries and prayers for peace.

At this time, it is very important to find support and sympathy. The war has been going on for two years, and all these events have had a

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Dr. Nataliia,
Family Doctor



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"I shall not die, but live,
and declare the works
of the LORD"
(Psa 118:17).

Latvia

Near Death, Restored to Health by Ilars Plume, Pastor

It was the last days of June last year. The Midsummer Festival had just passed and people were still in the post-holiday mood when I received word that one of my parishioners was in the hospital. It was Robert.

Twenty years ago, Robert was diagnosed with Wilson's disease, which meant imminent liver damage. The situation had been under control, but now things were looking grim. According to the doctors, a liver transplant was needed and should not be delayed for long. Unfortunately, after several unsuccessful cases, the liver transplant program in Latvia was suspended. But there was a glimmer of hope. Two young surgeons from Latvia were in Sweden at the Karolinska University Clinic's liver transplant department.

It was already Monday at the end of August. During all this time I was in daily contact with Robert. We chatted about this and that, about hospital food and things like that. To my surprise, Robert behaved very well, regularly connected to the broadcasts of church services on the Internet and was sure that God would hear both his prayers and those of the congregation. It is rare in such moments to see such a psychologically stable and confident person. This Monday was special as the Latvian surgeons were to present Robert's case to the Swedish doctors. There wasn't much time left. Robert had been in the hospital for almost two months and the situation was rapidly deteriorating. Reaction of the Swedes was very positive; they agreed to send their surgeon and anesthesiologist to Latvia to perform a liver transplant together with Latvian surgeons. The only question remained—where to get a liver donor?

Next day I got a call from Robert. This time he was very worried and said that the doctor offered him to sign consent for a liver transplant, but Latvia's experience so far in this regard was not encouraging. Robert himself didn't really know about what happened in Sweden and that Latvian doctors had been trying to find a solution to save him for at least a month. While I was talking to Robert, the news came that a donor had been found. I was in an unpleasant situation. I knew a bit more than Robert about what was happening behind the scenes, but I was not allowed to say anything. However, necessity

knows no law. I briefly told Robert what I knew, confirmed that the surgery would be conducted by an excellent surgeon from the Swedish Hospital and our own best specialists. After a brief exchange of words, Robert gave in and meekly agreed to the operation.

Wednesday morning came, but it might as well have been the

last for Robert. The problem was not only related to the liver transplant, but also the fact that despite the efforts of the doctors, Robert was very emaciated, the blood tests were critical, etc. Early in the morning I received some photos from him, an assurance that he completely trusted in God's providence, and a long day full of worries and prayers began. I calmed down only when I received a text message at around seven in the evening—the liver was in, everything went great! The next text message, later in the evening, made me smile as I read the words of our surgeon: "Everything happened as if it was carefully directed from above."

The subsequent recovery process was rapid and Robert is back both in church and in his secular work. Our dear Lord Jesus is good. ■



▲ Robert with painting, Psa 118:17



▲ Robert in March 2024



▲ Robert before surgery with his wife, Liga

Gift of Life continued

major impact on the health of Ukrainians. The Bible in Proverbs 17:22 says, "A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones." We try to create an atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable and a spark of hope lights up in their hearts.

The mobile clinic has two buses: a dental bus, where my colleagues provide services to patients, and a family medicine bus, where we have two family doctors and a nurse. People come to us for free medical care, and we examine them, provide them with advice and certain medicines. And through this, we want to show the love of Jesus Christ, show them attention and compassion, combining it with professional services.

"Gift of Life" has a great team, a friendly atmosphere, and every day is different. It can be difficult, but we all try to support and encourage each other.

Jesus said in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest". **If God lives in our hearts, we can share His love and warmth with others. We can be the light, those who hope for the best and share joy.**

Our organization serves different segments of the population. The other day, we had patients from an orphanage—very smart children. The consultation with them was very interesting; there were many questions and health tips. We also get people with disabilities; we share our experience and, whenever possible, improve their situation. Soldiers and their families also come to us during their vacation time.

Our employees have a kind word, quality advice, respectful attitude, and a special approach for everyone. We believe that by sowing goodness, it will be returned a hundredfold. We are waiting for each patient with love and believe that the best is yet to come. ■



(from left) Dr. Zorianna, Nurse Oksana, Dr. Natalia

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▲ Family Dr. Natalia with patient at MCOV

Students from Martin Luther School



Czech Republic

Our Ally

by Martin Vrsek, Pastor

March 12th, the Czech Republic celebrated the 25th anniversary of joining NATO. A conference called "Our Safety Not Taken for Granted", was held in Prague. Bill Clinton, the former U.S. president, was one of the guests and an important figure back in 1999. That year, it was the first NATO enlargement toward the former Warsaw Pact countries: Poland, Czechia and Hungary.

As Christians,
God, through
Jesus, is our
Ally. No evil foe
can overcome us
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by the power of
the Holy Spirit.

We appreciate this alliance we are blessed with, thinking of everybody who doesn't have such safety and the freedom which depends on their effort. Today, as allies and good neighbors, the Czech Gripen together with German Eurofighters flew a demonstration low-altitude flight over Prague city center.

We are teaching our Martin Luther School students how important it is to have allies and how important it is to defend freedom, which does not come free. We, as NATO members, need to contribute with our budget and a well-prepared army. We are welcoming Sweden in the alliance!

As Christians, God, through Jesus, is our Ally. No evil foe can overcome us when we are allied with Him by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Civil states need their army against the enemies of the state. And we, as Paul writes in Ephesians 6:13-17, are given God's armor to wear for our defense based upon the merits and work of our Ally—our risen Lord Jesus Christ.
Let us be prepared! ■

