

Moldova Family Ministry 2014 Trip Report

The National Presbyterian Church (NPC) and the Moldova Baptist Union have partnered for the past seven years in the Moldova Family Ministry, commonly known at NPC as the Moldova Marriage Ministry (MMM). The partnership is a key program in NPC's Serve ministries. Slavic and Ala Verenciuc are the Moldovan national leaders of the Family Ministries program. Last winter they invited NPC to send a ministry team to join them to develop and lead a marriage leadership conference, May 16-17, for couples from the nine regions of the Moldova Baptist Union. The core aim of the conference was to expand the family ministry to churches across Moldova by training couples to lead the ministry in their regions.

The Moldova Ministries group met six times in March, April, and May to plan their participation. After extensive discussion, the group agreed to organize the trip in the following way:

- Team Member Roles: One-half of the team (David Wallace, Phyllis Wolfe, and Howard Tucker- Frost) would go to Moldova to join the Verenciucs in delivering the conference. The other half of the group (Gene and Nancy Thompson and Miley Tucker- Frost) would remain in Washington to guide prayer for the ministry during the mission trip.
- Objectives: The Moldova Ministry group decided to focus the mission trip on two objectives: (1) provide leadership, training, and support at the marriage leadership conference; and (2) meet with NPC partners Moldova Baptist Union (MBU) and University Divitia Gratiae (UDG) to discuss orphan care and visit a church-operated orphan care home to gather information about orphan care needs and a possible role for NPC in orphan care ministry in Moldova.

The first part of the mission trip focused on objective one, the Family Leadership Conference held May 16 and 17. This report describes that conference and next steps in the ministry. The second part of the mission trip focused on the other objective of conducting meetings and site visits to gather information about orphan care needs.

Family Ministry Leadership Conference

- Approximately 24 couples and support team (total 60 people) participated in the family leadership conference at a Christian camp near the village of Vatici in central Moldova.
- Each morning, prior to starting the lessons, everyone participated in Christian fellowship through praise, music, and prayer.
- The content of the leadership program focused on the seven lessons of Alpha's The Marriage Course (TMC) and was presented in both Russian and Romanian languages. Approximately half of the couples were Russian speakers and the other half were Romanian speakers.
- The format and organization of the seven sessions followed the guidelines of TMC with couples sitting at small tables with flowers and candles to insure privacy during discussion activities. The Verenciucs were masterful in organizing a large room setting with individual tables for general sessions, and two breakout rooms with small tables for sessions with Russian speaking couples and Romanian speaking couples respectfully.
- Meals were provided in a beautiful area of the camp in view of a small lake. Good weather made it possible to have all meals outdoors.

- The Verenciucs arranged for two special events the evening between day one and day two of the conference. Everyone traveled to a nearby Orthodox monastery and toured the beautiful grounds and buildings. Afterwards, we all returned to the camp and participated in a traditional Russian coffee ceremony and joined in fellowship and signing around a campfire. Both events greatly contributed to a sense of “community” celebrating families and the love Jesus Christ
- The conference ended with couples sharing their appreciation for the opportunity to participate in the conference. Hope and interest were expressed by many couples for reaching out to other couples in their own churches and churches in their region.

Orphan Care Activities

The Moldova team traveled to Belts to meet with Senior Pastor Konstantin (Kostel) Cheptau at the Emanuel Church in Belts. Pastor Kostel Cheptau and Mission Pastor Vladislav Cheptau discussed the church’s outreach in its community and the organization of congregation members to support Victor and Aliona Briceag in their adoption of Olga and Oleg. The congregation, using German construction materials, renovated the home in which Bricieags live and coordinate the transportation for the family, who does not have a car. Pastor Kostel Cheptau indicated that parishioners are expected to participate in some way in service activities of the church. If parishioners are not so inclined, it is suggested to them to find another church community.

The team visited the Briceag home and was very impressed with the conditions at the home and particularly, with the warmth of the family they experienced. The parents take very good care of their two adopted children and one natural daughter; the children are very affectionate toward their parents; and the siblings get along well. The team thought that the way the Emanuel Church gathered to support the family was exemplary community involvement for churches.

The team met at the University Divitia Gratiae (“University of the Riches of God’s Grace,” formerly College of Education and Theology) with President Sergei Namesnic, Academic Dean Mihai Malancea, and Sociology Program Chair Vadim Bulgac. The group discussed the undergraduate sociology program the school administers and the graduate program the school ran from 2005-2013 with Baylor University (Waco, Texas). UDG leaders were complementary of the Baylor support and were pleased with the curriculum the two schools were able to develop. Baylor was not able to continue its support of the program after 2013, and thus UDG was not able to develop the program to the point it was self-sustaining. The UDG representatives suggested that if they could develop a Master of Social Work program to graduate a class of students within four years, the school could effectively use such an initiative to develop a self-sustaining program. NPC members discussed how NPC might be able to assist with such an initiative and told the UDG representatives they would consider the possibility further in the coming months.

Moldova Family Ministry – Moving Forward

Toward the end of the trip, the NPC team met with Slavic and Ala Verenciuc and MBU leaders including President Ion Miron to review the results of the conference and to discuss key points regarding moving the ministry forward.

- The group decided that the next key step in the ministry would be to provide guidance and support to the lead couples in each of nine regions as they implement TMC in their

own churches and other churches. The group decided that the Verenciucs will bring all the lead couples together in September to provide direction and resources for organizing TMC programs in local churches. Building on the knowledge and skills each couple received in the Leadership Conference, the Verenciucs will assist and mentor the couples as they implement TMC during the fall, winter, and spring.

- TMC materials in the Romanian language are available for lead couples in Romania speaking churches. NPC team members determined at the meeting to work with Slavic and Ala to find a solution to deal with the expenses of printing and shipping Russian-language TMC materials currently available only from Moscow.
- A concern of members of the NPC mission team is how ministry leaders in Moldova “follow up” providing options for further development to couples after they complete TMC. After discussions with MBU leaders, a process was established that Slavic and MBU colleagues would review materials and programs recommended for follow up. Slavic and Ala Verenciuc indicated they are providing Bible study opportunities to groups (e.g., women) and also programs like “Walk through the Bible,” and others. These and programs ones the US team shared with them are examples of programs that can be provided to couples after TMC.

The Verenciucs will provide in the weeks ahead the following:

- Budget Report and Conference Costs
- Participants names, churches, anniversaries
- Projected Plan and Budget for Remainder of 2014
- Projected Plan and Budget for 2015
- Website Projections

Prayer for the Team and Ongoing Prayer for Moldova

A key part of the May mission trip was daily prayer guided by the home-based prayer team of Gene and Nancy Thompson and Miley Tucker-Frost. Gene managed the principal aspects of the online prayer activities—managing the e-mail list, forwarding news updates, and posting pictures sent by team members in Moldova. All three participated in various ways in prayer support with the NPC members participating in the online group. The Moldova Ministries Group was very pleased to have an active prayer component of the trip taking place in Washington and recommends this type of liaison activity for other trips from the church.

The Moldova Ministries group is committed to prayer for Moldova and during the past several years has led a prayer time every third Sunday of the month at the church, usually after the last worship service. The group publishes an invitation in the church bulletin to the prayer time and asks any interested congregation members to join them.

Photos from the trip follow on subsequent pages.



Conference attendees join in song during worship before a session of the marriage conference.



Husbands presented their wives a flower during an exercise on caring for one's spouse.



Conference leadership team; Alla and Slavic stand in the middle.



Phyllis tries driving a farmer's cart. The local farmer who extended the invitation stands at left.



Conference members enjoy a hearty lunch and warm fellowship.



Participants at the 2014 Vatici Conference.



Senior Pastor Konstantin (Kostel) Cheptau and Mission Pastor Vladislav Cheptau at the Emanuel Church in Belts. Emanuel is the principal Romanian-speaking Baptist church in the city.



Aliona Briceag and Pastor Kostel Cheptau at the Briceag's home in Belts, along with adopted children Olea (Olga) and Oleg. Aliona's husband Victor and their natural children Magdalena and Eugene are not pictured.



Meeting at Bethany Baptist Church in Belts, Moldova with a Pastor Andrey Malanchuk (second from left) and members of the church (third and fourth from left).



UDG Provost Mihai Malancea (left) and President Sergei Namesnic (center) talk with NPC guests about social work education at the school.



NPC visitors meet with Moldova Baptist Union officials on marriage course and orphan ministry development.



Construction continues on the UDG training facility for outreach to Muslims.



Ala, Slavik, Phyllis and David sit at the new Chisenau park monument "True Love Waits," donated with funds from the Good News Baptist church in Chisinau, pastored by Vasile Filat. In the glass-enclosed portion at left are forms for individuals to pledge they will pursue abstinence until marriage. People leave one copy inside the sculpture and give the other to a church leader. There has been a very strong positive response from young people to the initiative.



NPC visitors host the Vereniuc family--Moldova Ministry Coordinators--at dinner at a local restaurant.