

SYNERGY newsletter



Ideas To Ignite Your Church's Global Impact

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HELPING A SISTER CHURCH GAIN A MISSIONS VISION

How can a USA church help a Slovak congregation develop a missions ministry? That was a question First Free was asking and praying about. And God opened doors for exciting opportunities to make it come about!

In July 2005, a team of eight students and two adults from Illinois joined eight students and two adults from Slovakia to do missions in Ukraine! The American team grew out of First Evangelical Free Church in Rockford, and they united with a team from their partner church in Levice, Slovakia to provide a children's camp for the First Baptist Church in Brovary, Ukraine.

The Illinois church had previous relationships with both churches.

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Relationship with Slovak Church: Levice

Since 1991 First Free has had an ongoing relationship with the Cirkev Bratska Church in Levice, Slovakia. More than 90 people from First Free have served on short-term teams to Slovakia one or more times. Teams have done English camps, discipleship camps, family camps and construction projects. They have also assisted the Levice church with church planting, giving support (personnel, funding, equipment and materials) to launch a new church in Nitra, 30 miles away from Levice.

Relationship with Ukraine Church: Brovary

In 1994 a team from First Free Rockford built a Kids Around the World playground in Brovary, Ukraine together with the First Baptist Church in that city. That step led to a longstanding partnership between these two churches.

Helping the Slovakian Church Become Missional

As First Free worked with the Levice church, Missions Pastor Bill Patterson of Rockford planted an idea in 2002. What if the Illinois church could help the Levice congregation put on a summer camp in Ukraine? The Slovak church had never done a missions project before, but perhaps their Rockford friends could help them and join them in such a venture! A year later a team of 26 students and six adults went from Rockford to Levice to help remodel a building for the local church to use as a drug-free, smoke-free and alcohol-free fellowship haven for youth. As members from the two churches worked together, the idea of a joint project grew, and excitement mounted!

Planning and preparations began, with active participation in all three countries. The strategy was that the joint team would take advantage of First Free's relationship with First Baptist in Brovary. For many months Rockford leaders did groundwork, coming alongside the Slovak and Ukrainian churches to assist them. The Ukrainian church made preparations for the actual camp, and plans were jointly refined by the Slovak and Ukrainian churches as they worked together.



In enlisting team members for the American half of the team, First Free restricted applicants to those who had gone to Levice in 2003. Eight of these previous participants responded, eager to return and build on their earlier experiences! Since some of the team members from the US and Slovakia would be high school students, the Brovary church would recruit middle school students as campers in Ukraine. Half of them would be from First Baptist Church, and the other half would be nonbelievers from the community.

Finances were a hurdle. The camp would cost \$5.00 per camper per day, including meals and lodging, but that was more than the Ukraine church could afford. First Free offered scholarships for campers, and it was decided that they would also ask the students to pay a small fee. To cover expenses of the team from their church (transportation, housing and food), the Levice congregation raised money for two years. The team from First Free raised funds for their own expenses, and their church helped with additional costs, including rental of the facility in Ukraine.

The Plans Come to Fruition

The US team arrived in Slovakia on July 5, 2005 and spent two days reconnecting with the Levice team and reviewing plans together with them. The joint team left for Kiev by train on July 7th.

Excitement mounted as campers arrived on Monday--and dreams became reality! Mornings were filled with worship, Bible study, and small group activities; afternoons with sports, games and fun. Evening programs highlighted American, Slovak and Ukrainian cultures, and a gospel presentation was given in the middle of the week. Camp concluded Friday with a farewell party--and many tears!

First Free team members shared enthusiastically about the camp and its impact....

"Just being in the presence of two other cultures was amazing in itself. I will never forget the experience of

worshipping God, through song, in three languages!"

"I loved working with the Slovaks and Ukrainians at the camp. God helped us cross the cultural boundaries to minister to the Ukrainian youth. Three completely different cultures coming together like we did was hard, but God used it. I have never seen results on a missions trip like I did in the Ukrainian camp. God crossed the ethno-linguistic boundaries that we were unable to cross ourselves."

"I would say that the Slovak team and the American team truly became ONE team as God's children. It was amazing how close we became...."

"I am still in contact with some of the Slovaks that I met.... I would go again in a heart beat."

Were there problems running a camp with three different languages and three different cultures? As might be expected, there were a few difficulties, with the major ones focused around finances. Despite good communications about most details of the camp (including money), there were some unexpected and unacceptable expenses regarding housing and meals in Brovary before and after the camp, and some issues about how much to pay interpreters at camp. The money issues, however, did not diminish the overall success of the trip and the camp.

All three churches were pleased with the results! An American team member said it was one of her "most life-changing experiences." Approximately 30 Ukrainian children made first time decisions for Christ, and the Brovary church followed up these new believers from their own community. Perhaps the Slovaks learned the most because this was their first missions trip outside Slovakia. The goal of First Free was to challenge the Levice church to consider their part in the Great Commission and become actively involved in sending missionaries themselves. And since that time they have built on their vision and experience, with plans to send teams to Romania!

With all the challenges of three different cultures with three different world views, working together in three different languages, was it worth all the effort it took? Without a doubt, it was! Bill Patterson believes that international teams are the future of effective short-term missions. He says, "They are a tangible evidence of the unity of the body of Christ. They allow people to see love in action in very practical ways, serving as a testimony to those who observe... [causing onlookers] to ask why people would come together from different countries to serve. And that platform can be used by the national church in sharing Christ with their people." As one of the team members stated, "What a blessing it was for our team that God would allow us to be part of His wonderful plan."

For more information about the partnership between First Free and the church in Levice, Slovakia, contact Bill Patterson at BillP@firstfreerockford.org or Don Oleson,

First Free church champion for Slovakia, at dono@firstfreerockford.org.

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A CERTIFICATE OF PARTNERSHIP

Lake Tapps Community Church in Sumner, Washington has shared the Certificate of Partnership designed and used between them and their sister church in Latvia. This document is available without charge at [TOOL PACKAGE](#).

CAUTIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

First Free has kindly shared with us some cautions and lessons they have learned as they have worked together with the church in Levice over the past years, especially in their joint effort to do a missions project in Ukraine. To take advantage of their experience, download these lessons free at [GREAT IDEAS](#).