

## **A short history of our Ukrainian connection.**

### How we met.

As soon as the country of Ukraine was invaded, Congregants began asking: What can we do to help? The Missions Board began to look as ways to help and then God provided a way forward.

Shortly after the bombs started falling in Ukraine a mutual friend introduced us to Skip, his Ukrainian wife Helen and their children. They made it out of Odesa on the last plane eventually to the safety of friends and family in Massachusetts.

Skip is a force! Besides running his business from a laptop, he works tirelessly to tell anyone who will listen about the atrocities in his adopted country. He introduced us to Arthur. Still in the Odesa area and unable to leave.... but maybe he was meant to stay...to help his neighbors. Many of them disabled children and their families unable to take the trip to the border and safety.

### Where we've been.

After a leadership meeting where Skip was one of the possibilities raised, it was agreed to invite Skip and his family to come speak to us. It was an inspiration to listen to their story and we were moved to begin to make donations.

Initially it was crisis support. Medicines, critical for many of those children were hard to obtain as the social service organizations closed down. People lost their jobs. Cash was unavailable. And no global aid getting in to help.

Our initial response was internal to the congregation. Skip telling his story, watching video appeals from Arthur (still in Odesa) and viewing pictures of the kids. Poignant. Sad. Unimaginable. We ended our initial response by helping six of the most critically disabled kids and their families escape Ukraine by rented bus to Romania where they can get the medical attention needed.

Through your generosity about \$12,000 was sent to Arthur to support the families in the village.... the village Skip and his family escaped from. Their connection is real and now we are connected to them as well. We are receiving letters and pictures from the families helped calling us "magicians" and "wizards" for saving them. They cannot believe complete strangers came to their aid.

### Where we are.

We've been working in Phase 2 developing a more robust fundraising event and connections to a non-profit organization in Ukraine, this may become a long-term commitment – much like Family Promise, Kayenta, Tewksbury Hospital and many others we support. We need to remember: the Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders and other major global aid organizations are still not on the ground in Ukraine. This is bootstraps effort. A 'startup' if you will.

### What's next?

In partnership with The Community House of Hamilton & Wenham we are planning a fundraising event on April 26<sup>th</sup> from 6:30 to 8:00pm at The Community House on Bay Road

Hamilton. The main event will be a presentation from our contact Skip. We'll hear first-hand stories about the horror that began with the Russian invasion. We'll hear letters from our friends in Odesa translated by Skip's wife Helen, who was running a local school; and see images the children created to thank their American supporters. Also at the event will be a silent auction and light refreshments.

Donations can be made before, during or after the event by scanning this QR code or send a check to the church office, made out to First Church with Ukraine in the memo line. Donations can also be made by visiting the church website, [www.firstchurchwenham.org](http://www.firstchurchwenham.org) and clicking on the Heart. On the drop down choose the Ukraine Fund.



Further out.

Who knows what God has in store for our mission venture?