

Annual Report to Mission Partners
2022

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Bratislava, Slovakia



SUMMARY

2022 became a year of wondering when we would catch a break from the presence of never-before-experienced challenges in ministry, and more broadly, in life! A year that began with hope that there would be “light at the end of the Covid tunnel”, took another unexpected and unsettling turn (even as we were still dealing with pandemic restrictions) when war returned to Europe in our neighboring country of Ukraine.

In some ways, riding 2021 into 2022 became the déjà vu of riding 2019 into 2020. In 2019 we were coming off our first year in the field, and just getting “comfortable” in a new country and culture, when Covid rode in during the month of March and turned our already “very new world”, upside down. Likewise, this year, though seemingly nearing the end of the pandemic, we came face to face with being the Lord’s hands of love and compassion to a country that was (and still is) desperately in need of help.

We believe that our God is not a God of coincidence, but of purpose. He showed Himself true to that again as there was God-purpose in how we became His response to the most tragic expressions of our fallen world. Purpose in being deployed in a country immediately adjacent to war-stricken nation. Purpose in having abilities and resources to get aid in and people out. Purpose in the provision He supplied through your hands, allowing us to work without financial restrictions. Purpose in every partnership created (and still developing) to make paths for both short and long-term responses in Ukraine.

Once again, you have played a critical role in our being able to say yes to the Lord’s invitation for every opportunity to serve where we are. From caring for nearly 70+ global workers in Europe (including our youngest global workers – our FMI kids), to shepherding our small congregation of individuals and families from 14+ cultures/nations and multiple faith backgrounds, to becoming quickly and intimately familiar with tragedy response. Thank you for praying for us, encouraging us, standing with us, supporting us, and loving us from afar.



It was in the first quarter that Covid gathering restrictions began to lift, enabling us to resume, face-to-face, at City Church International. Some public gathering controls remained until mid-March, preventing a small segment of our congregation from joining us, so we stepped up to adding both technology and a new A/V team to stream our services so that everyone in the CCI family could take part in our Sunday services. We left our streaming in place until all Covid restrictions were removed in March.

This phase of Covid restrictions took a greater toll on faithful attendees. Fewer people showed their faces regularly when restrictions lifted this spring than did in the spring and summer of 2021. Clearly many more were “neglecting to meet together” as Hebrews 10:25 emphatically encourages us not to do. It was primarily why we chose to remove our streaming services – to encourage our community to be “present” with each other.

The “not present” trend turned in a more positive direction as believers began to take inventory of the spiritual and emotional erosion they felt when they were absent from the body of Christ. And it was a season that allowed us to strengthen our servant leader core with over 50% of adult attendees now serving the CCI family in some way.

The elimination of travel restrictions in Europe also afforded us the opportunity to welcome pastors, friends, and fellow workers throughout the summer – some from other countries here in Europe, and some from the United States. A few of these planned trips were postponed from 2020 or 2021. The largest group we welcomed was 7 (adults and adult kids), who we hosted here at our flat, and gladly showed them the beauty of the country where we live! There is no substitute for being face-to-face!

Covid also visited us in our home this summer. The physical toll it takes is bad enough. But with our incredibly full schedule, making allowances for simply being in bed for days can be extremely difficult. Having it a couple of weeks apart helped us to be strength to each other, meeting one another’s needs while we were down and recovering. And we are so thankful that there have been no long-term effects from the virus for either of us!

We are hopeful that peace in Ukraine will open doors for new short-term mission work through the partnerships we are establishing there. We are in discussion with pastors and churches in the US about how they might help when those doors open. We will continue to work in Ukraine – even as the war goes on – while continually praying that peace will come soon and allow the work of many to turn to restoration and rebuilding.

We were honored this year to help plan, prepare, and put on the FMI Europe Fall Training in Barcelona. This gathering is an annual opportunity for our global workers to spend time with peers, enjoy some fun and rest, be challenged by the training, and be refreshed by times of fellowship with both old and new friends. This year’s training focused on care, with an emphasis on creating healthy life rhythms and strengthening ones that are already in place. Thank you for supporting our answer to Jesus’ invitation to be care for those who lay down their lives to love and serve the nations of Europe!

The longer we are on the field, the more we reflect on you – our faithful supporters. When we said “yes” to Jesus’ invitation to join Him here in Europe, we were very intimidated by what that “yes” would mean. How would we get there ... where would the support come from ... what would we be asked to do ... would we have the gifts and abilities to respond. There are many days when our “yes” does not seem adequate ... enough. But Jesus’ strength, His love, His wisdom, and (through you) His provision ... encouragement ... prayers ... is always enough. Thank you for your part of our “yes”!

DETAILED MINISTRY UPDATE (Looking Back)

JANUARY

We welcomed 2022 under limited Covid restrictions – much different and much better than the strict lockdown that meant a full 6 months of online church with no ability to meet face to face in 2021. Instead, we were managing the government’s every-changing position on what was required to attend a public gathering. For most of January, only people who had recovered from Covid, or had been vaccinated, could join us for the in-person gatherings that began on January 16th. Those restrictions would slowly be relaxed, allowing all people to attend by Sunday, February 26th.

We acquired technology and established a “live streaming” A/V team so that those under restrictions could join from home. Despite the relaxing of restrictions, we continued to offer the livestream option for Sunday services until May. We discontinued because we felt we were contributing to a habit of “not gathering” with other believers.



We welcomed our 6th grandchild (and our 5th granddaughter) Rosemary Strong Roley, on January 10th. Joy was able to be in Berlin for a week prior to the birth, looking after the other Roley girls and helping mama (our daughter Elizabeth) with many preparation tasks. Both of us were there in Berlin on the day of the birth, and ecstatic to welcome this beautiful girl!

Berlin has become a favorite and welcome change from the normal rhythms we have in Slovakia. It is a wonderful destination, and we usually make the drive in about 7 hours. The countryside of Central Europe (Slovakia, Austria, Czech, Poland, Germany) is beautiful, and German drivers are some of the best in the world!

We joined an FMI Europe Continuing Formation Cohort this month, going through the book “The Culture Map” with about 10 other FMI global workers. It was the first time through for this cohort, but this will become a go-to cohort for new FMI Europe workers. We learned so much from the book which maps out how 8 different aspects of every culture (communication, trust, delegation of authority, decision making, etc.), are viewed and handled differently by each culture.

A secular book, written by an author who helps international businesses work through mergers and acquisitions, uses business-world examples of navigating culture differences. But every example gave great insight and had practical cross-cultural application for global workers doing ministry in every part of the world! A must-read!

FEBRUARY

We spent a week in Linz, Austria, with FMI global workers Matt & Abby Edwards, and their girls Kylie, Madeline, and Audrey, helping them to put on a mid-winter break Kids Camp at the Foursquare Church of Linz – Cornerstone Gemeinde. It was a great opportunity to support friends we've had since attending our first week of FMI training together in 2015, and peers in the mission field here in Central Europe.

Our role was helping to set up, decorate, and take down each day, and to teach English for an hour twice a day to two different age groups of kids. What a joy to see Matt & Abby in their element as they support the Austrian Foursquare church and build new ministries with kids.



It was Thursday of that week that we were all sickened to find out Russia had indeed invaded Ukraine, and war had once again returned to the European continent. Such a tragic contrast to the fun and freedom we were experiencing as we introduced these carefree kids to the love of Christ, even as war was being waged against a peaceful European nation! It was really good to be with fellow global workers as we prayed and processed through what this meant for Ukraine, and what it meant for all of us.

As we drove back to Bratislava that next Friday afternoon, we talked through our concerns and anxiety, somehow knowing that the landscape of our lives and ministry would be forever changed.



Jeff and Debbie Roper assembled a Zoom call for our FMI Europe Ministry Team that Friday evening to map out a communication strategy for the entire FMI Europe family. It was important to everyone to have a known exit plan – if required – and to have it ready to be initiated. And to be ready to respond to needs in the cities where each of us live.

Early the next week we swung into action with a communication plan to match available housing resources with refugees coming to Slovakia. Networks of people from Foursquare, City Church, and the greater Apostolic Church of Slovakia, linked up to create safety net, of sorts, as needs for (mostly) short term shelter popped up all day.

We were not yet two full months into 2022, and whatever game plan existing for life and ministry was already being pulled off the shelf and examined for drastic modifications. Every emotion influenced the flurry of activity that filled the minutes and hours of each day. Anger at the outrageous act, anxiety over our own safety and that of so many friends in Ukraine and central Europe, guilt from feeling all that we were doing to help was but a drop in the bucket, sadness from all of the hate, destruction, and suffering.



Our hearts and attention were immediately on a young Ukrainian family in our own CCI community – Dasha and Volodymyr, and their young son Anton. They had been in Slovakia for several years, finishing degrees at university and starting new careers and a family. Volodymyr is from Kharkiv and Dasha is from Sumy, and their concern for family was evident as we joined them (and Anton) for burgers at a Bratislava restaurant just three weeks prior.

Our CCI family rallied around them. Supporting and praying for them. Allowing them to talk and process through (in person and on chat threads) their anger, anxieties, and emotions about the war, and worries over family who were directly in the line of fire in both Kharkiv and Sumy. Joy and I, and our entire City Church family consider it a privilege to have and to care for this family, so directly affected by the war, at CCI.

MARCH

We hit the ground running in March with a flurry of activity to support refugees both here in Bratislava and in Ukraine. God provided a home (through a compassionate owner of a large vacant property near us) to house refugees. And it was a core of young adult Ukrainians that were already living here in Bratislava that took charge and helped us turn this opportunity into a working refugee home for those seeking any kind of housing.

Tajovského House, as it is called, is only a 5-minute drive (or 15-minute walk) from where we live. Each of the City Church locations made contributions – donated and purchased furniture – bedding – household supplies – appliances – clothing – food – and labor to clean, deliver, and set it up. It was incredible to see this love and compassion in action. And not a moment too soon as refugees were arriving and moving in daily. We couldn't even imagine the thoughts and emotions as these refugees landed in a foreign country with little more than the clothes they wore.

We tried to make the difficulties as manageable as possible, delivering new clothes, food, and toys for the youngest ones. One of the first to stay in the home was a foster mom with a handful of both adopted and foster children. We were thankful to play a small role in bringing a small amount of comfort and security to their lives.

Gary made his first trip into Ukraine in March well. Through connections within the Apostolic Church of Slovakia (the denomination that all City Church locations are part of), we were introduced to a new partner – Jaro – who was taking aid (food and medicine) into Ukraine, and bringing refugees out, with a 40+ passenger bus.

Gary and Roman accompanied Jaro from Presov, Slovakia to Ukraine and back, making stops in Uzhorrod and Lviv to drop off mattresses, food, and medicine. Forty refugees were then picked up at churches in Lviv and transported to Rzeszów, Poland before they returned to Presov. Added to the front/back of this trip was 4 hours delivering additional food, medicine, and mattresses from (and returning to) Bratislava.



It was a very welcome return to Bratislava for Gary. Not just because of the very long and physically/emotionally draining trip to Ukraine, but because our youngest son Ben had arrived for a 10-day visit from the United States. Planned long before the start of the war, it was a God-given gift to have one of our kids here, and close, during a very unexpectedly hectic time. Family ... and being with family, is one of the greatest sources of encouragement to those of us working cross-culturally in foreign nations. Still managing a huge load of relief work for Ukraine, we nonetheless found time over 10 days to do some cooking and eating great food together at home and making day-trips to explore some of the beauty of our home country of Slovakia and our neighbor nation - the Czech Republic.



We (the greater City Church family) also created 1,000 welcome packs for refugees coming across the Ukraine – Slovakia border. We saw this compassion in action when we crossed into Poland with the refugees the week prior. We spent hours waiting in line with thousands seeking safety in other countries – immigration, customs checks, documentation reviews.

And in the midst of this waiting, were small points of compassion and comfort as volunteers passed out water, juice, food, masks, hand sanitizer, and info cards (in Russian & Ukrainian) giving info on safety and connections for transportation/housing.

These stories were being repeated hundreds and more times over. Volunteer communities of all size and flavor across Slovakia, coming together to welcome refugees and to help in any way possible. From the very smallest to the very largest of compassion expressions, Slovakia was, and the Slovak people were saying to Ukraine “We are your neighbor ... you are family ... and we are here to help”.

It was in these early days that the smallest and most nimble of volunteer and charity organizations were critical. Governments and larger NGOs took more time to make decisions and get resources moving. But individuals, families and churches, got love and compassion moving to meet immediate needs until the larger players could come in with more significant resources. These small players – including our teams at City Church – continued to meet needs through the whole year. Every piece – large and small – is needed and every piece is deeply appreciated by those in need.

APRIL

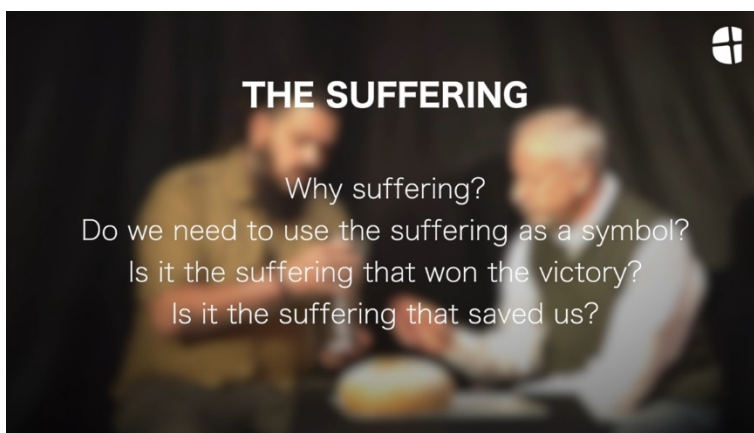
April brought additional help and encouragement from our dear friends Dan & Rosanne Thompson. As a doctor and nurse practitioner, Dan and Roseanne have traveled the world doing medical missions in many different cultures and with many different teams. Their medical gifts are incredible, but it was the gifts of friendship, prayer, and encouragement that blessed and brought healing to us as they simply came to show support for the new work we were doing on top of all that the Lord had already given us to shepherd.



Dan and Roseanne really rolled up their sleeves by sharing and encouraging our CCI family on Sunday morning, joining us for a specific time of prayer and ministry to a couple in the CCI family, accompanying us in the pickup, packing, and delivery of aid (including a new generator) to Jaro in eastern Slovakia for another trip into Ukraine.

It was just what the doctors ordered (yes, pun intended)! We could not have had more fun, nor be more encouraged, by a journey of many hours just to say, “We see you ... we hear you ... we love you ... and we want to stand with you and help you!”

We celebrated our fourth Easter with the City Church International family. Easter will always remain one of the very special times of year for us as it was the first celebration we shared with our new church family, only 4 weeks after arriving in Slovakia in 2019. Remarkably, two of the four Easters we’ve celebrated here were under lockdown. This one – 2022 – was only the second one in person. Hard to believe we’re actually saying that!



Roman Lacho prepared and led a powerful online devotion for Good Friday, asking “Why the cross ... why the blood ... why the suffering?” The questions were answered on Sunday morning and celebrated the resurrection on Sunday, knowing and better understanding the elements of the path Jesus obediently chose to walk into that victory.



Gary made his second trip to Ukraine with Jaro in April. Again, taking food and medical aid in, and bringing refugees out. In just 5 short weeks, the flow of refugees was changing significantly. Fewer refugees were leaving Ukraine, and more of them were looking for transportation further west (to Germany or France), which Jaro was not set up to provide. So, the focus began to shift to the transportation of aid and moving higher volumes of food and medicine more efficiently.

Once again, everyone we met and delivered aid to were incredibly grateful that help was still pouring in from Slovakia and neighboring countries. While there were fewer Ukrainians now seeking shelter outside of the country, many were still pouring into western Ukraine from the front-line areas in the east. These refugees, known as Internally Displaced People (IDP), would become the focus of much of the relief effort inside of Ukraine.

Grateful to still be making a difference, we would continue to seek opportunities to help both in Slovakia and across the border in Ukraine. It was humbling to see the strength, resolve, and hearts of so many Ukrainian people helping out their brothers and sisters however they could manage.

At the end of April, we joined the FMI Europe and MENACA (Middle East North Africa Central Asia) Ministry Teams to find ways to collaborate and learn from each other. These Ministry Teams are made up of a small group of global workers providing help to regional leaders and serving the needs of peers within the region. And while most of our focus is on the region in which we serve, this meeting was meant to learn best practices from each other, and jointly review plans for our fall training in Barcelona for global workers from both regions.

These Ministry Teams are a great group of seasoned pastors and global workers, all invested in ministry in the countries where they live, but also giving of their time to insure the health and vitality of FMI workers across each of our regions. We love this group of fellow global workers and pastors and are honored to serve the FMI Europe family in this way.



MAY



Gary drove to northern Italy to attend the annual Fellowship of European Foursquare Churches gathering. Joy stayed behind this time, mindful of her own boundaries and the crazy schedule both immediately behind, and in front of us. This FEFC gathering is meant to encourage and strengthen pastors and leaders in the Foursquare churches of Europe. And FMI Europe sets aside an extra day to fellowship with any of our

FMI peers who are able to attend – about twenty this year! It was a special reunion with our dear friend Aaron Hunter who joined the gathering to present Foursquare’s global initiative for youth ministry. Gary and Aaron also spent time reminiscing about missions work we did with Aaron and his wife, Francis, with a team we took to Chile in 2014!

We traveled to Estonia, to serve the Mayer family, FMI global workers in Tallinn. Joel and Keturah have been serving in Estonia for 10 years and asked if we might hang with their three boys while they escaped for a very special anniversary trip. It was a joy to be



with Atlee and the twins, Asher and Lars. Joel and Keturah got the time away and rest they needed, and we and the boys really enjoyed our time together. We got hooked on a dinnertime episode of “Secrets of the Zoo”, giving the “inside scoop” to all things happening at the Columbus, Ohio zoo and wildlife park. No matter how old you are, you never stop enjoying being around kids, or being a kid yourself!

We also got to connect with John and Anneli Kelly and their kids Aria and Levi. They are also FMI global workers serving in Estonia. It was Levi's birthday while we were there, and they had driven into Tallinn for the day to celebrate at Super Skypark – a massive indoor park with trampolines, climbing structures, and games. It was nothing short of a kids' play paradise! We only had one challenge - finding the twins amongst what seemed like acres of trampolines and games (and kids) when it was time to go!

The Lord had put it on our hearts to reach out to a friend (an FMI global worker from another region) about the possibility of spending a week in Bratislava for some rest and if they wanted) some Sozo ministry. We also felt we needed to use ministry funds that you have so generously provided, to get this person here, and facilitate their stay, at no cost to them. We were pleased when they agreed that it was what they needed so we spent a week in late May and early June hosting and ministering to this dear friend.

It is an understatement to say that cross-cultural ministry takes a physical, emotional, and spiritual toll on those who say yes to join Jesus in this work. Therefore, we count it an honor and a privilege to be His hands and hearts of love, compassion, rest, and recharge to those of our peers who will allow us to help them in this way. Thank you for being a faithful source of support to allow us to do this and bless others!

JUNE

If it seems like March, April, and May were crazy ... well, they were. We were really needing to escape and rest, ourselves. Not yet at the burnout stage, but we were not firing on all cylinders and needed to lay low and refill to effectively keep pace with all that was on our plate. We took five days and drove to the small coastal town of Umag,



Croatia. People around Bratislava refer to Croatia as the Slovak Sea as it's the favorite "go to" beach destination for Slovak people.

Our agenda was simple ... nothing on the agenda. And it worked well. We read ... we walked ... we ate ... we explored ... we lazied (yep, made that word up). Even the 6-hour drive was relaxing – much of it through the beautiful country of Slovenia. We would be poor leaders of global worker care if we didn't model it ourselves. Croatia is now a favorite for us as well – I guess we're becoming more Slovak ourselves!

Slovaks have a unique opportunity to travel to and be a kingdom presence in countries where others (including us from the United States) cannot. Slovak people are not seen as threats – politically or socially – so they are often welcomed to live and work in almost any country. It is this open door that some friends (a young family) are taking advantage of as they prepare to deploy as global workers to an otherwise closed country. Knowing their deployment would happen this fall, we took a couple days to travel to eastern Slovakia to see, pray with, and encourage them.



We love being invited into the everyday lives of friends here in Bratislava. Our good friends Roman and Barca have seven beautiful children and, of course, very busy lives. So, it was a delight to be invited to see their daughter Sinai's dance recital. We joined their entire family, including both Roman and Barca's parents, at a community theatre in Petralka (borough of Bratislava). Sinai (middle right in photo) beamed as part of this gold medal team!

JULY

We got to meet and have coffee – and zmrzlina (ice cream) with Rick and Ally Salz, International Church of the Foursquare Gospel board members from Oregon. They were here in Central Europe on holiday and wanted to connect with and bless us. We shared a delightful afternoon showing them some of the highlights of Bratislava, including Bratislava Castle, The Blue Church, and Stare Mesto (Old Town).



We also kicked off our summer series “From the Mount of Beatitudes” at City Church International. It was really fun to see the unique perspectives on different sections of Jesus’ sermon on the Mount through the hearts and spirits of both our usual teaching team, and several guest preachers. We love the way that God speaks to us through different men and women! City Church International is blessed to have several men and women teachers who regularly contribute to what the Lord is speaking to our community of faith!

Gary made his third trip to Ukraine in July. This time establishing a new partnership with the parents of the young woman who now coordinates the City Church Ukraine response - both here in Slovakia and in Ukraine. Nastia has been part of the team since the beginning, instrumental in getting the Tajovského House set up in March. City Church was able to formalize her role, bringing her on as a full-time paid staff member for all congregations through a grant from Samaritan's Purse Canada.



Nastia is from a small town south of Kyiv (Tarashcha), and her dad and mom – Sergei and Olya – are helping to coordinate the distribution of aid to churches in their town and surrounding villages. We took a full van of aid from Bratislava and made the two-day (each way) trip to deliver it to Tarascha. It was the first time Nastia had seen her family since the start of the war. Emotional and very long, every moment of this trip was worthwhile as this new partnership was formed to get aid into a new area of Ukraine.

Thankful that virtually all Covid travel restrictions had been lifted, we welcomed both friends and family to Bratislava and to Slovakia in July! Most of the Gaeta family and all of the West family, pastors and friends visiting from the Bridge Church in Rancho Santa Margarita, California, stayed with us for five days on the front end of their holiday to Hungary and Croatia. We had the joy and privilege of showing them Vienna, Bratislava, and some beautiful parts of the eastern Slovakia. We were so encouraged and energized by their visit. It's incredibly refreshing, especially when it happens so infrequently, to be around fellow English-speakers and pastors! We were blessed that they would come and love on us!



We also welcomed the Mason family. Sean, Vita, and their four kids Eva, Oliver, Eleonora, and Zigmus are FMI global workers in Korce, Albania. They were on a road trip to Vita's native Lithuania and stopped to spend four days with us here in Bratislava. It was a double blessing as we also got to have lunch with them as they passed through on their way back to Albania in early September!



AUGUST



This month we welcomed Joy’s brother Jim, and his wife Pat, who were also on holiday in central and western Europe. Unfortunately, Pat spent her visit to Bratislava in our guest room as the Covid bug had gotten ahold of her just as they were arriving. It wasn’t an isolated case, however, as Gary was just getting over Covid, and it was just knocking on the door for Joy. Somehow, we all managed ... isolating in different rooms and in different ways.

Joy managed to get some sightseeing in with Jim before she started to feel sick, and then tapped out for Gary to take over until Jim and Pat left on the next leg of their trip. It all seems like a blur now, but we certainly remember needing a full month or more to recover from all of the activity, and the assault on our bodies from Covid!

Despite the long recovery time, August was the month that Joy finally got on her bicycle. There were many obstacles to this from when we arrived in Slovakia in March of 2019 – Joy recovering from the knee surgery she had in California the month before came. Joy suffering from intense shoulder pain (we are thinking from the repetitive work she had been doing at her job with Bed Bath & Beyond) that took nearly a year with much searching and many visits to work through finding doctors and receive treatment for. When it was all said and done, however, and with the help of a new bike rack paid for by Covid benefit funds unexpectedly received from the Slovak government, we were off to Devinska Nova Ves (a nearby Bratislava suburb) to get back on the bikes and enjoy a day of exercise and sunshine.



In addition to our work inside Ukraine, we have partnered with the Alzbeta Aid Bank here in Bratislava. They are working with Ukrainian refugees in this community to make sure they have the food, clothes, and medicine they need to care for themselves and their families. When we purchase and deliver aid, there is always a long line of people waiting to go in the Alzbeta “store”, where they can choose items that they need. It is good to have local partner organizations who continue to focus on the welfare of those who have had to leave their home in search of a safer life. Many, we know, have a heart to return and help rebuild their country. While they wait in safety here in Slovakia, we are happy to help them in any way we can!



SEPTEMBER



Our CCI Men's & Women's Life groups started back up after the summer break. Thursday is Life Group night, with the men meeting on the 1st & 3rd Thursday, and the women meeting on the 2nd and 4th. We find that this helps moms and dads both participate by tag-teaming the "home-alone" duties one night a week. Our guys began a new study through the book "The Measure of a Man". A different guy leads our

discussion each week, with the book focusing on twenty godly attributes laid out by the Apostle Paul in his letters to Timothy (II Timothy 3:1-7) and Titus (Titus 5:1-9).

We joined the FMI Europe and MENACA Ministry Teams for our second collaboration meeting of the year. It was a rare privilege to be in the city where the east meets west – Istanbul – and to be on FMI MENACA soil. Our meetings continued to focus on sharing best practices and developing global-worker-centered initiatives in both regions. These meetings were also held, purposefully, the same week that the Foursquare Church of Turkey held its annual conference. We were invited and humbly accepted the invitation



to stay and be part of this conference as well. We were awed by the testimonies of the church growing within Turkey despite real threats to the lives of its pastors and leaders. It was both humbling and inspiring to see the resolve of Christian leaders carrying the good news of the gospel to their nation, regardless of the and risks or dangers it may pose.

Coincidentally, our son Ben's work in the United States started bringing him to Turkey, and he was there at the same time. We weren't in the same cities, so he came to spend time with us in Bratislava "on his way home". His work affords him the opportunity to work remotely, so he can be with us and still accomplish what he needs to for his job in Texas. It's always a blessing to have him here with us! And even though we already had a ministry trip to France planned, Ben decided to come along!

We drove from Bratislava to just outside Baden-Baden, Germany on day one. And then on to Tours, France, the next day to spend some time with Dianne Parcher, an FMI global worker who has been serving the people and Foursquare church of France for many years. Dianne is a business-as-mission (BAM) global worker, meaning she works in industry to support her ministry work. And her secular work as an English teacher – both at universities and in business – gives her the opportunity to develop friendships and business relationships with the French people that she can connect to the church.



From Tours we headed back east and stopped in Strasbourg, France, to spend time with Francois and Nathalie Gendron. They are FMI global workers who pastor a church in Strasbourg, and just celebrated their 20th anniversary of doing so – wow! They share the church ministry with their adult kids Eve and Joseph, and Joseph’s wife Keyla. Gary was asked to preach on Sunday morning,

and Nathalie even called an audible, asking Gary to lead part of worship as well. It was a joy to be with their church – Lumiers des Nations (Light of the Nation) – and their church family. It reminded us a lot of CCI, with families from many different countries and cultures. Francios and Nathalie have become dear friends.

Our return trip to Bratislava was uneventful, but we did make a purposeful detour through Switzerland and Lichtenstein. And we spent the night – on our 36th wedding anniversary, in a small village in the mountains of western Austria. The beauty of nature, the company of our son, and a wonderful dinner (Ben paid!) made it perfect!

OCTOBER

Our friends Sheldon and Anna Armitage are the former pastors of CCI. They were the ones who the Lord connected us to when we sought help in understanding life in Bratislava, 9 months before we came. And of course, they were the ones who the Lord used to open the door for us to secure our long-term resident visas through pastoring. We knew from our very earliest of Skype (remember that) calls, that this would be an important relationship for us here in Slovakia. And the Lord has used that relationship, allowing us to provide global worker care to them (and others) outside of our normal Foursquare network. We are thankful that God asks us to serve in this way!



We developed a lasting friendship with Sheldon, Anna, and their three daughters Mia (17), Livia (15), and Stella (12). Mia, in fact, is sometimes with us on Sunday mornings, using her vocal gifts with the CCI worship team. And we love to spend time with the girls, so when Sheldon and Anna asked if they could stay with us in October while they attended ministry meetings in Serbia, we of course said yes!

Anna is now a pastor on staff with City Church Bratislava (the Slovak language City Church congregation). And Sheldon, a PAOC global worker, focuses his work with human trafficking on behalf of an NGO based here in Europe. The Armitage family has had a very difficult couple of years. Anna has lost both her grandmother and mother, Livia lost a basketball coach to cancer, and Mia (and all the girls, really) have faced tragedy at their school with the death of two students at their school under very tragic circumstances. As you read this, please join us in prayer for their family ... for the rest and healing they need, and for any additional ways that we can love and serve them.



Gary made his 4th trip to Ukraine in October. This time he, Roman, Anna (above) and Nastia took a full van of aid into Lviv to meet up with our friends and partners Kostya and Olya. They were grateful for the additional help. We shared dinner with them and their kids at their home in Lviv, and then left the next morning for Tarashcha. The plan was to leave the hotel at 7:30, but air raid sirens prevented us from leaving before 10:00.



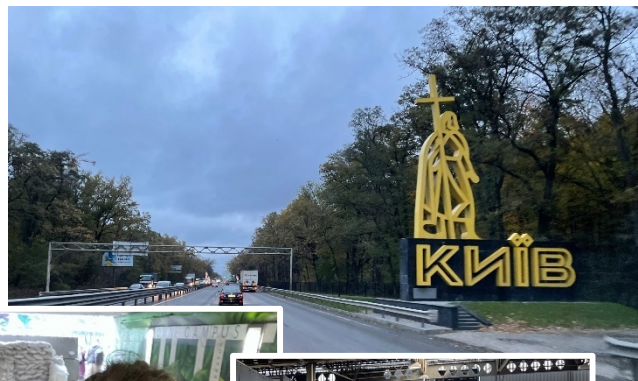
Wanting to take a full van load of aid to Tarashcha as well, we stopped at Metro in Lviv (think European Costco) and re-stocked the van for the next leg of the trip. Sergei and Olya were likewise delighted to see us and to receive the additional supplies of food, medicine, warm blankets, and clothes. This time we spent an extra day in Tarashcha, meeting some of the pastors and the churches that Sergei is working with. The need is overwhelming, but so too is the response of love and compassion by thousands. We are grateful to join them!

We detoured through Kyiv on the way back to Lviv. We set up a meeting with an organization working with an NGO we have relationship with here in Slovakia. We are hoping that there may be additional stores of food and medicine that Sergei can tap into between our shipments and visits. We have managed to get truck shipments to Sergei as well.

In Kyiv, we met our contact, Peter, at a coffee shop. Unfortunately, our meeting only lasted about twenty

minutes as air raid sirens came once again and we were forced to leave the building. All stores, restaurants, etc., close when there are air raid warnings. A regular

disruption that all Ukrainians have gotten used to tolerating, but one which is incredibly disruptive to their daily lives. Nastia will continue to work this Kyiv opportunity for her dad. One additional night in Lviv, a very long wait at the Ukraine-Poland border, and a long drive back to Bratislava. A long but productive trip indeed!



The end of October brought the culmination of a year's worth of work in planning and preparing for our FMI Fall Training as over 100 global workers gathered in Barcelona,



Spain. This was a unique meeting in that it combined two regions – FMI Europe and FMI MENACA. We may not have a combined meeting every year, but the success of this year's training shows that we can do it well, and everyone likes the cross-pollination that takes place. Extra special for us was the time we were able to sneak in there with our friends from Montana (God's country) Paul and Carina Greer!

The focus of this year's Fall Training was Care – hence the reason we were involved in the planning and preparation. Our speaker and teacher was Angie Richie, President of Life Pacific University and MFT Counselor. She taught on the theme of Rhythms – establishing and strengthening healthy life rhythms that feed our body, spirit, and soul. Much of her material challenged and stretched everyone in attendance. We returned home with a greater awareness of our own care rhythms and care needs.



We were also pleased to add some pleasant “before and after time” as we had Ken & Linda Stapleton come to Bratislava so we could accompany them to Barcelona, make the trip easier, and thank them for their many years of work in the Czech Republic. Ken and Linda felt the Lord’s call to complete their full-time work in Czech and return to life in the USA this year. FMI Europe honored them in Barcelona for their amazing faithfulness of 25 years in Czech.

NOVEMBER

Since we left the United States in the spring of 2019, our time with family has been very limited. A wedding in 2019, our return to the United States for furlough in 2021, occasional trips to Berlin, and a few visits from our son, Ben, here in Slovakia. It is one of the most difficult parts of global work. Something we have to accept, but not something we have to like. That is why, when the perfect opportunity presented itself to us (all of our kids and all of our grandkids being on the same continent at the same time this fall), we knew we had to act. It was something that hadn’t happened since our son Ben and his wife Tanja’s wedding in the summer of 2019. So, we made the decision to have one large Peiss family reunion in November.



It was difficult keeping ourselves from connecting with other friends ... because you are so dear to us, but we decided to protect the boundary this time and use our short stay in the Pacific Northwest to just be with our kids and grandkids. Our time with them could not have been better. It



rained on the day we arrived, and it rained on the day we left. And every day in-between was glorious ... cold ... clear ... sunny PNW. We were in heaven seeing the in-person interactions between our kids and between all the grandkid cousins. It is the stuff that dreams, and deep soul therapy, is made of. Our only regret was and is, that we couldn’t make it last.

DECEMBER



Prior to returning to Europe, we stopped in Los Angeles to spend some time with our friend Robby Booth. Robby is a Marriage & Family Therapist and Foursquare pastor who is a resource for other Foursquare pastors and global workers. We were told of a 2-day marriage “tune up” that Robby does, and with 35 years of marriage under our belt, and new challenges from a radical change in life assignment these last 4 years, we felt like a

“tune up” would be in order. And we were right. We were given a lovely room with a private bath in Foursquare’s House on the Hill in the Echo Park area of Los Angeles. After a day of rest, we readied ourselves for how the Lord would speak to us about ourselves and our marriage.

It was so good (and challenging and exhausting) to be with Robby for this 2-day “intensive”. Many elements reminded us of the Sozo work that we do with others, so the process and outcome were familiar and welcome. We came away with new freedom and new truths in our lives and in our marriage, thankful for how the Lord had ministered to us through Robby. We recommend this investment for any marriage!



As good as it was to be with family in November, it was equally hard to not be with them at Christmas. Our first Christmas ever without any kids. But we celebrated with our City Church International family with a lovely Sunday morning Christmas service.

Gary led worship, and we had a special time of gift-giving and a movie for the kids. Joy’s hospitality was on point as she brought her homemade cinnamon rolls to share at our fellowship break.



And together, we shared the Christmas story and a devotion titled “What Child Is This?”. Despite the absence of kids and grandkids, it was still a special Christmas in Bratislava.



Slovakia celebrated 30 years as an independent nation with much partying and many fireworks on New Year's Eve. But the end of the year was more of a quiet pause for us. Reflecting on all that the Lord had done in and through us, all that He had blessed us with, all that we were able to endure with the grace and strength He had given us. We know that pause will be momentary, but His grace, and everything else He is for us,

is sufficient. Sufficient for now ... sufficient for today ... sufficient for what lies ahead.

2022 / 2023 ... LOOKING BACK & LOOKING FORWARD

2022 was far from more of the same. We entered the year under familiar government Covid reports and restrictions. And life events in January and February (a new granddaughter, helping with a Kids Camp, etc.) made the year seem as “normal”. But when we were tempted to look at it that way, it only took 55 days (until February 24th to be exact) to tell us something was going to be very different. Yes, there were indicators and news reports for months leading up to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. And as things got more intense, so many (us included) intensified our hope and prayers that something so unthinkable would never happen. Tragically, it did.

Initially in shock, we struggled to think clearly amongst the disbelief that was running through our heads and the emotions that were running through our hearts. The Lord was, and continues to be, our rock ... our lighthouse in the midst of this storm. Giving warning away from thoughts and emotions that harm and direction to ones that are safe, productive, peaceful, life-giving.

We were not alone. Our Ministry Team from FMI Europe assembled quickly online and began to pray and strategize how the Lord might use each of us to both reassure our FMI family in Europe and respond in ways that would help where help was needed most. Our City Church team (pastors and leaders of City Church International and of the other City Church congregations) also assembled, knowing that there would be immediate needs and an urgency to be organized to see and help meet those needs.

The first few days and weeks were a whirlwind. Much of our work was sourcing housing for refugees pouring out of Ukraine. Some days were productive and fulfilling, some days we were spinning our wheels and very frustrated. Refugees are desperate – we would be too. Desperate to find a roof over their heads and a bed to sleep in ... for themselves, their grandparents, their children and some, their pets. Hours spent searching, and even finding, were often met with, “Somebody already found us housing somewhere else”.

We began to develop relationships with others working the same challenges. This included former CCI members now living in eastern Slovakia, other FMI global workers in nearby countries, local NGOs sourcing food and medicine from anyone that could provide it, Slovak pastors and friends initiating transportation of aid into and refugees out of Ukraine. It was an incredible, sometimes chaotic, but beautiful response of love and compassion to a man-initiated tragedy of epic proportions.

As weeks gave way to months, any altruistic notions of being able to help everyone who crossed our path faded. The “reality” of tragedy response set in, and everyone had to be at peace (and even find joy) in the small parts we played and the victories we were able to see.

Those early days of tough sledding have given way to deep relationships and secure channels of aid both locally and from Slovakia into Ukraine. We have tried to keep aid moving to and through each channel as best we can, concerned that an unused pipeline will be shut off or restricted. Financial resources are waning as the world turns its compassion response to other countries and other tragedies. For now, however, we have what we need and are committed to staying engaged as long as the Lord leads.

We learned to balance this one additional area of responsibility. Not dropping our initiatives and work in global worker care, nor our work of pastoring a local community of believers, we simply (OK, it wasn't that simple) added another layer of ministry. One that invigorated, impassioned, frustrated, and exhausted us, at times. But one that also became intricately woven (in a good way) with every area of life and ministry. Ukraine is, and will continue to (and forever) be, deeply imprinted in our hearts and our spirits.

You will never meet a braver and more resilient person than someone from Ukraine. We are blessed at CCI with a young Ukrainian family who were here before the war started, and members of their family who joined after fleeing the conflict (some who even came, and then returned). Each one is thankful to be in our community of faith, and not just willing, but happy to serve however they can. Even those we met still living in Ukraine count their blessings before their difficulties and are always ready to help a neighbor.

Our very important work for Ukraine had much to do with other plans being put on hold. Language learning, development of a CCI servant leader team, the beginnings of a CCI children's ministry etc. Not an excuse, but our Ukraine response was a real and present user of available bandwidth and resources. We are still learning and working on making the adjustments necessary to get back on track with plans that were postponed.

City Church International stayed healthy. Though like many congregations, it suffered from post-Covid-restriction apathy. Sunday faith gatherings became one of many choices. Should I attend online? Should I watch another church's service? Should I sleep in and watch later? Should I go hiking, or to the park, or ride my bike instead?

We believe that we (the church) were partly to blame – making it easy for someone to “attend church” from the comfort of their living room. It's why we stopped streaming our services when the last of Slovakia's public gathering restrictions were dropped. But the wave of infrequent attenders gave us pause and provided opportunity to go to God's word and meditate on what He says about being present with others from the body of Christ. It was from those meditations that we began to encourage our community to come back for reasons that God showed us, not just because we wanted them to come.

Despite the fluctuations in weekly attendance, City Church International stayed about the same size in 2022, with about 40 adults and 15 kids, from 15 different nations now calling CCI home. In a small congregation, new people are always noticed and welcomed with great joy. Departures are equally noticeable and met with sadness.

Our CCI Men's and Women's Life Groups also gained strength. Relationships within the CCI body were increasingly (and rightfully) being seen as more than a pleasant two hour mingling of Christians on a Sunday. Deeper relationships, and deeper levels of ministry have come from these more personal and intimate midweek gatherings.

We continued to have opportunities to serve and deepen our relationships with FMI global workers from all across Europe. We are being welcomed to care, to help, and to spend quality face-to-face time with global worker couples, individuals, and families. Our Care Cluster leaders are our go-to core for making sure FMI global workers are seen and heard. Being part of a Care Cluster is not required, and some FMI Europe global workers lean towards a low-level of participation. But our Care Cluster leaders are nonetheless faithful in letting those in their cluster (participating or not) know that they matter to their peers, and that there are care resources available when needed.

Our own care cluster is made up of the seven couples that each lead the other clusters. We schedule faithful and regular (bi-monthly) Zoom calls with each – 4 in one month and 3 in the other – modeling to them what we'd love to see in each of their clusters. We love these calls as they deepen our relationship with them – us getting as much or more encouragement and strength from our cluster leaders as they do from us.

And the concept of the Care Cluster grew this year. We were contacted by FMI Global Associate Directors from other regions to give insight and share resources so that they can develop similar care structures. Even close friends, who have taken over the leadership of member care for another global worker organization, are asking about and learning from our approach as they work to implement a similar care structure as well.

2023 is already slated to be a full year. At CCI we will teach through the book of John – a journey we are willing to take slowly with no destination date in mind. Our team of teachers – Gary, Roman, Mazvi, Daniela, and a few guests sprinkled in for “added insight”, are excited to see what the Lord will show us and teach us through this journey.

We will set aside a fun night in January to honor and celebrate all those who have served the CCI family so faithfully in 2022. Great fun (bowling) and great food will highlight an evening of fellowship and appreciation – something we haven't done since Covid interrupted many normal rhythms in the spring of 2020.

Gary has been invited to join the City Church Board of Directors that oversees all activities and congregations (Bratislava, Pezinok, International) of City Church. We welcome the greater exposure that this will bring to City Church International, and we expect it will play a key role in assisting the growth initiatives we are working on - both finding/developing a new pastoral team for CCI and securing our own meeting space.

Joy will join the newly developed City Church Missions Council, made up of pastors from each of the City Church congregations. This Council will develop and carry out local and global initiatives, supporting both workers and projects, on behalf of City Church Bratislava, City Church Pezinok, and City Church International.

The development of our new CCI Servant Leader Council will also highlight an important 1st quarter. We have identified the initial key leaders we'd like to be involved, and we are praying they will each say "yes", agreeing to make space in their life for the once per month meeting, as well as time in their minds, hearts, and spirits for the thoughts, prayer and discernment needed to share the responsibility of leading CCI.

We will continue investing in more intimate gatherings through our Men's and Women's Life Groups. Our men will continue reading through and discussing the book "Measure of a Man", highlighting 20 attributes of a godly man – taken from I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 5:1-9. The women are looking at possibly using a book we recently read titled, "Changes That Heal".

We would also like to initiate a midweek prayer & worship gathering, but we are praying and asking the Lord for confirmation, as well as the bandwidth, to make it happen!

Our close friends and pastoral partners at CCI, Roman and Barca Lacho, are preparing to return to the United States as global workers to the Lakota Tribe in Lower Brule, South Dakota. They expect their deployment to take place in late summer or early fall. We will dearly miss their friendship, their seven amazing kids, and the faithful support they have given us as cultural brokers, part-time translators, Life Group contributors, dear friends, and full-time advocates for City Church International and the CCI family.

With FMI Europe, our participation in and work with Jeff & Debbie Roper's FMI Europe Ministry Team will continue. This small team of 10 people, including the Ropers, serves the FMI Europe global worker community through prayer, planning, and carrying out initiatives related to Care, Coaching, and Continuing Formation.

Our FMI Europe Care Team – a small team of three individuals plus ourselves – will continue to help us find and implement ways and resources to care for FMI Europe global workers. This team is made up of global worker leaders and peers who have experience with field workers and field worker needs. They will continue to be a valuable resource for us and FMI Europe as the Lord gives them creative care insights.

We will also continue to invest in our Care Cluster leaders, both personally and corporately, with visits planned to several of them in 2023. We are being nudged by the Lord to take our Care Cluster relationships deeper, so we will work to provide resources to help them develop a greater level of trust between them and those in their cluster.

We will also work across Europe, strengthening the relationships we have with most of the FMI Europe global workers. We continue to both host workers in our home, and visit them in theirs, making time and space for relationship and care development wherever we can. This includes doing inner healing (Sozo) ministry when asked.

We will be present at the Fellowship of European Foursquare Churches conference in April. FMI Europe's new partner District (Western) from Foursquare USA will bring a group of leaders to begin establishing relationships, and to get a better understanding of how Western District leadership and churches can partner with European national leaders and FMI Europe global leaders in the work we are doing with Jesus here.

We are also already making plans and will travel to the United States to be part of Foursquare's 100th Anniversary celebration and Connection 2023 in Anaheim. This will be a "working" furlough for us, setting aside ample time for connecting with our support team – individuals and churches – in many locations. Of course, we will sneak in some time to be with our kids and grandkids (who are growing up so fast!).

Like the way that 2020 and 2021 were affected by Covid, there was much we planned and expected in 2022 that did not come to fruition because of time devoted to helping Ukraine. The Lord knows that, and He is patient to wait and give wisdom to regrouping on some of those initiatives. We continue to learn to be patient and give things more time to develop – a cultural norm that is present in most European countries. We will never get used to interruptions like pandemics and wars, but we are thankful for the opportunities they present in lieu of what we might have had planned.

We are incredibly grateful for all the Lord has done during our nearly 3 years on the field. And we are both humbled and strengthened by the faithful trust, confidence, encouragement, and support of all those who are partnering with us to make it possible!

2022 CALENDER & KEY EVENTS

| | |
|----------------|--|
| January 1 | Welcomed in the New Year under new Covid restrictions Bratislava International Fellowship officially becomes City Church International (CCI) City Church International begins a regular rhythm of Prayer & Fasting, the first full week of every month |
| January 9 | Beginning of CCI Series “Preparing in Prayer” – focusing on the prayers of Jesus in Matthew 6, John 17, and Ephesians 3 |
| January 10 | In Berlin to welcome 6 th grandchild (5 th granddaughter) Rosemary Strong Roley |
| January 11 | Begin 10-week FMI Europe Continuing Formation Cohort on “The Culture Map” |
| January 16 | CCI resumes in-person Sunday services, but under “OP” control, limiting attendance to Covid recovered or Covid vaccinated individuals, with the wearing of masks required at all times |
| February 20 | CCI begins its 1 st part of 20-week series through the Book of Romans – Foundations |
| February 21-24 | Linz, Austria, to help FMI Global Workers Edwards with mid-winter break Kids Camp |
| February 24 | Russia invades Ukraine |
| February 25 | Zoom meetings with FMI Europe Ministry Team to assess risks and effects of Ukraine war on FMI Europe family, and needed response |
| February 27 | Initial meetings with City Church pastors and leaders to assess risks of Ukraine war locally, and to plan response and ways to help |
| March 1 | Tajovského House is established in Horsky Park area of Bratislava, with capacity to house up to 30 Ukrainian refugees |
| March 14-18 | 1 st trip to Ukraine, delivering aid to Uzhorrod and Lviv, and bringing 50 refugees out of Lviv, providing transportation to Rzeszów, Poland. |
| March 18-30 | Youngest son Ben here to visit and encourage |
| April 5-12 | Fellow FMI Global Workers Dan & Rosanne Thompson here to encourage us and serve with us in helping Ukraine |
| April 6-8 | Packing and delivery of aid supplies and generator to Presov, Slovakia, for delivery to church in Lviv, Ukraine |

2022 CALENDER & KEY EVENTS (continued)

| | |
|---------------|--|
| April 19-21 | 2 nd trip to Ukraine, delivering aid to Lviv, and providing refugee transportation to Kosice, Slovakia. |
| April 26-29 | FMI Europe & MENACA Ministry Teams meeting in Madrid, Spain to discuss cross-region collaboration and review details of fall FMI Europe/MENACA training meeting in Barcelona |
| May 1 | CCI begins 2 nd part of 20-week series through the Book of Romans – A Restored Relationship with God |
| May 5-9 | Gary attends Fellowship of European Foursquare Churches conference in Italy |
| May 16-25 | Tallinn, Estonia, to serve FMI Europe global workers family Mayers |
| May 22 | CCI begins 3 rd part of 20-week teaching series through the Book of Romans – “Living A Godly Life” |
| May 27-June 3 | Gary & Joy welcome an FMI global worker from another region for a week of rest, recharge, and Sozo ministry |
| June 4-10 | Drive to Umag, Croatia, for a week of rest & recharge |
| June 21-23 | Kežmarok, Slovakia, to meet with and encourage a young family deploying as global workers to a closed country. |
| June 30-5 | Berlin, Germany, to visit kids and grandkids! |
| July 3 | CCI begins 9-week summer teaching series on the Sermon on the Mount – “From the Mount of Beatitudes”, welcoming guest preachers, including Pasho Zsolnai, senior leader of City Church Bratislava |
| July 11-15 | 3 rd trip to Ukraine – this time delivering aid to new partners in Tarashcha (south of Kyiv) |
| July 19-23 | Host Gaeta and West families from the Bridge Church in Rancho Santa Margarita, California |
| July 26-29 | Host Mason Family, FMI global workers from Korçë, Albania |
| August 6-10 | Host Jim & Patty Shaw, Joy’s brother, and his wife, from Vancouver, Washington |
| September 4-7 | Second FMI Europe & MENACA joint Ministry Team meetings in Istanbul, Türkiye (Turkey) to continue cross-region collaboration and finalize details of fall FMI Europe/MENACA training meeting in Barcelona. |

2022 CALENDER & KEY EVENTS (continued)

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| September 8-10 | Foursquare Türkiye national conference in Istanbul, Türkiye |
| September 11-26 | Youngest son Ben here to visit and encourage |
| September 13-21 | Road trip to France to support FMI global workers |
| September 14-15 | Tours, France, with FMI global worker Dianne Parcher |
| September 16-19 | Strasbourg, France, with FMI global workers Francois & Nathalie Gendron |
| September 18 | CCI begins 4-week teaching series “Out of Context” |
| October 9-12 | Host PAOC global worker kids Mia, Livia, and Stella Armitage |
| October 16 | CCI begins teaching series on the life of David – “Life After God’s Own Heart” |
| October 17-21 | 4 th trip to Ukraine – delivering aid and encouragement to partners in Lviv and Tarashcha |
| October 24 | Host FMI global workers Ken & Linda Stapleton before/after FMI Europe/MENACA Fall Training in Barcelona |
| October 25-30 | FMI Europe/MENACA Fall training “Rhythms” in Barcelona, Spain |
| November 7-21 | Pacific Northwest, USA, for reunion/gathering of all Peiss children and grandchildren – 1 st time in 3½ years |
| November 27 | Celebration of Thanksgiving with Gary’s brother and sister-in-law, Craig, and Carolina |
| November 27 | CCI begins Advent teaching series “Worth Waiting For” |
| December 5-6 | Marriage “Tune Up” intensive with FMI counselor Robby Booth |
| December 25 | Christmas morning celebration service with City Church International |

FINANCIAL UPDATE

In 2022, support funds came in specifically earmarked for our work in Ukraine. So many of you reached out to help, and funds started appearing in our account in March. We are incredibly thankful, and incredibly humbled by this support. Thank you!

Officially, all FMI global workers are self-employed workers, contracted to do missions work as 1099 employees. Therefore, we are responsible to make estimated tax payments directly to government entities. This includes employer and employee portions of Social Security & Medicare taxes (SECA), and income taxes to Slovakia.

Expenses paid out of our ongoing support fall into two categories – Living Expenses and Ministry Expenses. They are treated and reported on differently because funds for our Living Expenses are issued as 1099 income and are therefore subject to USA and Slovakia taxes. Funds for our Ministry Expenses are reimbursed directly and are not subject to taxes. Our budget includes provisions for both expense types and all taxes.

Expenses for relief work undertaken for the war are also Ministry Expenses reimbursed directly by Foursquare. Foursquare's financial team have been very helpful about accommodating expenses unique to this type of ministry and response. Every dollar you give for our work in Ukraine is being spent on refugees here in Slovakia, and for our trips to, ministry in, and aid given to Ukraine.

At the end of 2021, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (ICFG), the parent organization of Foursquare Missions International (FMI), initiated changes in which type of expenses they would reimburse directly, as Ministry Expenses. This in turn affected the total amount of taxes we paid on our income in 2022. Those expense types which were previously eligible for direct reimbursement (not subject to taxes) last year, became reimbursed as income and subject to taxes. And although the total of out-of-pocket expenses didn't change, the "cost" of those expenses to us (in support dollars) increased because of the additional taxes we had to pay on them in 2022.

As a result, 2022 was a bit of a "learning year". It would have taken a very detailed and prolonged analysis (educated guesswork, really) to budget for this a year ago, so we chose to "ride it out", believing our support dollars and spending habits would still allow us to live within our means. To a very large degree, our discernment was correct. We ended the year with enough support to cover all our expenses (including the additional taxes we paid this year). And the data we now have will allow us to adjust to minimize our tax bill going forward. Prayers for this are appreciated!

Our support remained very strong in 2022, down only 2.3% from 2021. And yet, like last year, our actual income exceeded our budgeted income (this year by nearly 7.3%). This "above the budget" additional income was used to fund new technology for City Church International (computers, video streaming equipment, etc.), and to assist a global worker to travel here to Bratislava for rest and ministry. Thank you!

Despite some unknowns with expenses (see discussion above about ICFG changes in reimbursements), we felt in 2021 that our TOTAL expenses for 2022 would remain about the same and made only a slight budget adjustment (down 1% from 2021). Our actual 2022 expenses ended up at 1% over budget but were more than covered by actual income that exceeded our budget by 7.3%. ICFG changes resulted in our Ministry Expenses being over budget by 6.4%, with overall expenses being 1% over budget.

We have made some “educated” adjustments to Living and Ministry Expenses for 2023, with our monthly TOTAL expense budget staying about the same, while making provisions for increases in Ministry Expenses due to expense policy changes.

CHANGES COMING IN 2025

Over the next two years, Foursquare will continue to build a more comprehensive system for both donor and member care – one that will accommodate a greater number of global workers. As the FMI global worker team expands, the people and resources needed for the team will need to expand as well. And while historically Foursquare has paid for the FMI support team solely out of the tithes and offerings of US churches, it will move to a more globally accepted (and scalable) model of supporting the team out of the support given to FMI global workers.

A portion of support gifts will be used to fund the training, deployment, and care team that supports FMI’s global workers. For those of us already on the field, this change will take place in 2025. It is estimated that this contribution will be about 10%, but the final number will be established sometime this year. We wholeheartedly support the expanding work of the gospel and will work to raise the additional funds we need to cover our contribution through increases in existing gifts, and through new supporters.

God’s provision through our supporters is incredible! He has always provided 100% of our budgeted Living Expenses and Ministry Expenses through your faithful hands. Thank you! We are confident that the Lord will always provide what we need!

We are so honored, and so blessed by your faithfulness. Thank you! We are humbled when your gift arrives each month, and humbled that you would even increase that investment in 2022 – wow! An incredible testimony of God’s provision encouragement!

Your faithful support is practical, spiritual, and emotional encouragement in the ministry work we are engaged in every day! Our everyday expenses lovingly being taken cared for by God, through the faithful investment of each of the individuals, families, and churches who have said “yes”!

Thank you! We could not and would not want to do this without you!

OUR SUPPORT TEAM

We hope we have communicated well, the critical and deeply important role that you play as part of our team. The distance and the fullness of life and ministry (on your end and on ours) makes it so challenging to be “in relationship” with the precious people in our life – especially in ways that we are used to. Precious to God for the way you have said “yes” with us ... precious to those we serve and serve with as we are enabled and empowered to minister in Slovakia, across Europe, and now in Ukraine. Precious to us as we know and sense a faithful chorus of support and encouragement for all God asks us to do. You are continually in our hearts and prayers. Thank you for standing with us!

Communications is a deeply held value of our ministry. Our Ukraine ministry work opened up a new need for sharing what the Lord is doing, so we initiated a blog that can be viewed on our website. We do our best to add new and updated content. We also continue to invest in monthly communications through printed & emailed newsletters, through written correspondence and Zoom/FaceTime calls, and through some presence on social media. Social media can be a bit of a black hole ... taking even more of our precious time than we give as we try to use it as a communication tool as well. Still learning here!

We are so thankful for those who came and visited in 2022. There is no better way to get a sense of the world we live in, the atmosphere we operate in and minister from, than to come and pour into, with us, those we serve. Would that be you sometime in the future? Reach out to us if you sense the Lord speaking to you in that way – we would welcome the opportunity to explore what that looks like!

VISION (Looking Forward)

It is hard to believe that in March of 2023, it will have been 4 years since we stepped off a plane from the USA and were installed, four days later, as pastors of City Church International (then Bratislava International Fellowship). What a roller coaster ride it has been. All of the expectations and realities (they're not the same, haha!) of global ministry work, shrouded in the context of cultural whiplash, a world pandemic, and a modern-day regional war. If this was in the fine print, we missed it.

Despite all of that, we do not let our circumstances define the vision the Lord continues to give us. We do make adjustments to be as effective as possible in the assignment the Lord has given us. Ukraine is one such adjustment. Our two-pronged focus of leading care initiatives for FMI workers in Europe and pastoring the community of faith at City Church International remains in place, but Ukraine has been interlaced with both. We are seeking balance, knowing we are over-committed with our responses to all the needs. So, our prayer for 2023 is just that – a healthy balance in all that the Lord is asking of us, with an openness to pieces being moved or removed as the Lord sees fit.

With that in mind, here are the ministry and personal goals we have for the coming year.

MINISTRY GOALS

We continue to deepen relationships with each FMI global worker and worker family in Europe. This helps us be better equipped, and to equip our Care team and Care Cluster leaders to meet the needs of FMI Europe global workers when they are expressed. We love to care in ways that are both unique to a given situation, and unique to the person being cared for.

We continue to work with our FMI Europe Lead Care Team that includes us and three other FMI Europe workers. This team plans, initiates, and oversees care for all of FMI Europe. Our FMI Europe Care Cluster network (7 clusters) remains healthy and adjusted marvelously to several changes in 2022 – transitions of people on and off the field, and changes to cluster leaders necessitated by some of those transitions.

The Lord has spoken to us about growing a greater level of trust between our cluster leaders and those in their cluster. So, we are encouraging them to do that in ways that fit each relationship in their cluster. The pathway for care is now there. Deeper levels of relationship and trust will facilitate that care happening when the need presents itself.

We will continue to travel and be present with global workers in 2023. Seeing life through their homes, their countries, their culture, and their family, is the best way to build relationships and trust. We feel that we are now well known across Europe, and that our heart and intentions to care and bless are recognized and affirmed.

Though it was our heart, we did not establish a team of servant leaders who would share the responsibility of guiding and caring for the City Church family in 2022. We have already taken steps to do that in 2023, with 5 individuals identified to take part, and our first – 3rd Monday of the month – meeting will take place on January 16th. We are calling this team our CCI Servant Leader Council.

The need is still present for a children’s ministry. Young singles, couples, and families still make up the majority of our congregation, and the number of children continues to grow. Families at CCI had 3 new babies in 2022. We are still praying for someone with a heart for children and a vision to lead to take on this mantle!

We still feel that City Church International needs its own ministry space, and we are continuing to look for and explore spaces that might work (size and monthly rental cost). We thought we had identified an ideal location in the summer – a location within a small commercial space between two apartment buildings, and right across the street from a regional train station – but the landlord decided they wanted the commercial space going to a commercial tenant – not a church (these landlord “choices” are a reality for communities of faith in Slovakia). Our servant leader team is growing weary of setup and takedown responsibilities, as well as the frequent problems with changes to setups/equipment in a shared ministry space. We are continuing to search and pray!

Much of our early response to the war in Ukraine was reaction – unorganized at first but getting what we could to who we could as quickly as we could. As the needs became better defined, and partners (resource providers, transportation methods, and distribution channels) plotted themselves on the available/faithful graph, we began to align ourselves with people who were compatible with how and when we could help.

We will continue to refine this process and these relationships in 2023. We still have financial resources earmarked for Ukraine that will carry us into the new year. Our focus will remain on aiding the hurting population (food, clothes, medicine) in Ukraine, and supporting the refugees here in Slovakia. When peace comes, we will ask the Lord if and how our response should be adjusted, expecting that He will open doors to provide help with rebuilding and restoration.

PERSONAL GOALS

Sabbath, Exercise, Personal Health

We did better with establishing a regular Tuesday (best day that works) sabbath, but we hope to do better at “guarding” this boundary in 2023. Prayers – especially for Gary in weeks when he is preparing to preach, are appreciated.

Joy is back on her bicycle, and we hope to make this a regular part of our “exercising together” routine. We received a very nice €600 surprise when the Slovak government mailed us a “thank you” voucher for getting our Covid boosters. The money was well spent as we purchased a bike rack for our car!

Gary had a long road of navigating the Slovak health care system in 2022 when his GP (because he had turned 60 in late 2021) made recommendations for a whole list of specialist checkups. Persistence is the name of this game as it took him nearly one year to complete all the visits requested. There were no major issues, but a very thorough gastroenterologist found a stomach ulcer and recommended lifestyle changes that Gary has been working on. Her belief is that the ulcer came from stress ... prayer is appreciated for working on that one!

Language

Still making slow progress on this one. Like our sabbath, we need (and are asking for prayer for) discipline to create and protect at boundary for language study. Pray will start working with our friend Nastiia to learn Slovak, and Nastiia, in turn, will have Joy to help her improve her English. This is a big answer to prayer, but prayer is still needed for both of them to faithfully make and protect their time together.

Gary will continue to use book and online learning – better for his available learning times and learning style.

MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES WITH OUR PARTNERS

We are thankful that lifted travel restrictions enabled travel for those who sought to come to Slovakia in 2023. We were recently asked about short-term mission opportunities by an FMI District Missions Mobilizer. Our response was framed around the three areas of ministry where we are currently joining the Lord in His work here:

COMPASSION FOR UKRAINE

Rebuilding and restoration. Coming with funds and hands to help rebuild structures and spirits. Most likely assisting with construction and encouragement in a church setting. This assumes that the war is over and low-risk access is possible. If this appeals to you, and depending on timing, it would be a raise-funds-and-wait-for-a-green-light (no war) situation. We have several contacts there and would choose the opportunity that best suits the timing and team.

PASTORING IN BRATISLAVA

Blessing young families. Coming with funds and people to put on a marriage retreat or seminar. Our church is small with a lot of young families, and it would be great if this could somehow involve a husband and wife – teaching and pouring into young families. The other members of your team could help facilitate and watch / engage kids while mom and dad have free time to learn and be blessed.

CARING FOR FMI EUROPE GLOBAL WORKERS

Coming with funds and a team to bless Global Workers. We could envision an event that was “attached” to a Foursquare Europe or FMI Europe gathering but set aside to bless and minister specifically to global workers. Some of the team would hang with / engage with / bless MKs, while the rest of the team creates and facilitates sessions to bless their moms and dads. Fun outings (eating, recreation, etc.) ... massages ... women things (hair, nails, etc.) ... times of prayer and encouragement.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER GLOBAL WORKERS

Don't see something above that floats your boat? There may be collaboration opportunities that we can facilitate with one of our other FMI Europe global workers or global worker families. Share with us what's on your heart, and we're happy to build bridges and help when you come.

WHAT WE ARE HEARING

Be ready for a changing landscape in Ukraine. We don't know what the role will look like, but we feel that the work we've been doing and the relationships we've developed, will provide opportunities to serve the Ukrainian people after peace in Ukraine is declared.

Relief is coming for an overfull plate. 2022 was overwhelming in so many ways. When one is stretched thin, they are tired from the stretching and discouraged from the way their work must be shared among so many. Such was the case for us. We believe the Lord is saying that relief (change) is on the way.

We took concrete steps in 2022 to begin the process of praying into, seeking, finding, and mentoring the next lead pastors. We are doing this, of course, with the approval, help, and unified discernment of the leadership of the Slovak City Church team here in Bratislava. We have created and have agreement on a description of the roles and responsibilities, and that description has been shared (confidentially) with leaders of two organizations who already have people working in Slovakia, specifically.

Even when new pastors are found, we will not step away from CCI unless the Lord (or the new pastors) specifically ask us to do that. We envision a season of mentoring a new couple, helping them to transition into leadership, and then stepping back and sideways a bit to embrace ministries within the church that we'd like to invest more time in. But we are also open and willing to adapt if what we envision is not what happens.

Establish midweek prayer and worship. We've been hearing it for some time, and Gary and Joy both have a passion to start and lead this, but our plates are full. We need wisdom (and time) to see and understand how the Lord can make this happen.

PRAYER REQUESTS FOR THE COMING YEAR

Thank you for your continued prayer support. We feel the many and faithful prayers of those who converse with God on our behalf!

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|-------------|--|
| Health | Spiritual, emotional, physical. Especially sabbath and exercise rhythms and faithfulness. |
| Help | Development of a trusted servant leader team through formation of the CCI Servant Leader Council. A person with a heart for children and development of a children's ministry. |
| New Pastors | Faithfully following the process of identifying and passing the lead pastor baton at City Church International. |
| Grace | In and with all relationships |
| Learning | Language |

CONCLUSION

2022 – the word of this year was definitely Ukraine. We are so thankful for being in such a place as this at such a time as this. And once again, we are continuing to do what God has called us to do in the midst of very challenging circumstances. Every year we become better prepared for the unexpected. And while we would really welcome some expected things in the coming year, we are thankful for every moment, place, and purpose that the Lord has entrusted us with this year.

Our testimony remains one of trusting the Lord and trusting those whom the Lord has put in our lives to support, train, encourage, and equip. Thank you, Lord, and thank you, all, for your trust and for the part you are playing in this amazing story!

God is good!

Gary & Joy

