



Joel and Ukrainian refugee camper in Moldova



For God's Children
INTERNATIONAL

a personal note

from joel burkum

FGCI Executive Director

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"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32/ESV).

The Apostle Paul encourages believers in Christ to be kind, tenderhearted and ready to forgive each other with the understanding that God extended his mercy and forgiveness to each of us through Christ. I love the Greek word Paul used for "tenderheartedness." It's the word *eusplagchnos* which literally means, "having strong bowels, or good guts." In English, this word is often translated: "compassion." [Another form of the word, *splagchnizomai* (pronounced, "splunk-NEEDS-oh-my"), used a dozen times in the New Testament, is also usually translated as "compassion."]. This is the kick-in-the-gut feeling or sensitivity we experience when we are moved to assist someone in need. Jesus often experienced *splagchnizomai* as he interacted with hurting people during His ministry.

Over the years, I have experienced this strong feeling to jump in and help when I've seen the struggles and pain the kids (and adults) we serve have had to endure. *Splagchnizomai* is the motivation that moves us to demonstrate God's love to the children and adults we serve through the ministry of FGCI. For you regular supporters of FGCI, I want to say thank you for your tenderheartedness (*eusplagchnos*), support, patience and generosity that continues to propel us to minister to God's hurting children.

As I was preparing to write this "Personal Note" FGCI ministry update, I was asked by one of our supporting church's missions committee members to answer a few questions about our current ministry status and plans for the upcoming year. As I answered their questions, I thought my responses would serve well as a general update for our contributors and prayer supporters. Here are their questions and excerpts (with some additions) from my responses to them.

1) What is FGCI's mission/focus for the next year?

FGCI continues to provide much support for the Ukrainian refugee



Joel and Ukrainian refugee moms and kids at Bible camp in Moldova pause for a group photo during a game.

families we have been supporting regularly since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine War in February of 2022. Each month, we send \$8,000 to help 30-35 refugee families in Moldova (through our representative, Vlad Pogor), and to help Ukrainians sheltering in dangerous zones of Ukraine (thanks to the help of our ministry partner, Vadim Sorochin, of Kyiv, Ukraine). The refugees living in Moldova have lost family members, jobs, fortunes and property during this

prolonged period of devastation. Currently, we are considering plans to help the refugees find more stable housing arrangements for their future. Most of the refugee women I (Joel) spoke to in August at our Bible camp in Moldova told me that they were NOT planning to return to Ukraine after the War. So, we are investigating possible housing solutions for these refugee families where they are not under the constant stress of being told that

"this may be the last month that we (the Moldovan government) will provide free housing for you." This summer at our Bible camp in Moldova we had around 65 Ukrainian refugees. They all expressed tremendous amounts of gratitude for all of the help that FGCI has provided for them during their crisis. ["You remind us that God doesn't forget us," is a common sentiment we hear from the refugees.] Also, many of them said that even though they had lost almost everything in this physical world, that they were happy to have found Jesus through our ministry to them. Several of the women and their children have made decisions to accept Christ as Lord and Savior. Praise God! [At the end of camp this summer, several came forward to confess their faith in Christ. One of the first-time-attending mothers wept as she explained that she had never been part of the Church or attended any event like our Bible camp that had so touched her heart. We laid our hands on her and prayed for her new-found faith to grow and mature. Afterwards, she told me that "it felt like the hands of Jesus on my shoulders." Praise God! He is at work even through the horrors of this war.] We plan to continue to support these refugee families in Moldova (for as long as needed), as well as helping many internally displaced Ukrainians who have come to know Christ while sheltering in Ukraine.



Ala Sorochin, wife of Vadim, does counseling with children dealing with issues related to the Russia-Ukraine War.



More than 100 campers attended FGCI's Moldova Bible Camp last summer. Our attendees were Ukrainian refugees, Roma (Gypsies), Moldovans, Romanians and one American...FGCI Executive Director, Joel Burkum.



This fall, we learned of a single mother from Moldova who is struggling to earn enough money to keep a roof over her head. FGCI recently helped her repair her roof and wood-burning stove.

Another area of focus for FGCI is our foster home in Nisporeni, Moldova. This summer, we rejoiced as one of our foster girls was united in marriage to a very nice Christian young man. Even more exciting was seeing all five of the rest of our Home of the Good Shepherd kids receiving Christ in baptism! Praise God!



Joel Burkum with FGCI's Home of the Good Shepherd kids last summer.

We did some renovations to our large Home of the Good Shepherd house in Nisporeni that the government of Moldova says will allow us to add two or three more foster children to the house. We are scheduled to add brothers, Andrei (10) and Victor (9), on November 27, Lord willing. Praise God! One of the boys is deaf and has very little language acquisition. As of yet, I (Joel) haven't met him, but I am excited to help him begin to learn Moldovan sign language as soon as possible (as we have several connections with deaf Christians in Moldova). With the addition of the two boys, we will have seven foster children living at our Home of the Good Shepherd again.



This spring and summer, all five of the kids living in FGCI's Home of the Good Shepherd were baptized into Christ. Ruslan was baptized in April. All four of the girls were baptized later in the spring/summer.



On November 27, we received two more beautiful boys (Andrei and Victor, brothers) to live in our Home of the Good Shepherd in Nisporeni, Moldova. So far, they love it!

Over the past two years, we have built three tiny houses for needy Roma (Gypsy) families in the village of Vulcanesti, Romania. This has been a big blessing for these families, and has provided a big, open door for ministry among our Roma friends in this "all Gypsy" village. Teams of FGCI volunteers from the USA have traveled over to Moldova to build these small homes from the ground up. Each home is 4 meters by 6 meters (approximately 13' x 19') in total floor space. Each tiny house has two rooms separated by a wall with a wood-burning stove. Next year, we are planning to build at least one new tiny house in Moldova. We have learned of a family comprised of a single mother with three children, whose home in the village of Sherpeni was destroyed by fire. We are considering this family home as one of our next builds in the spring and/or summer, depending on the size and availability of our 2026 teams. Houses cost about \$20,000 in materials. Team members pay for



Radic and Sveta (left) are the first people to receive the gift of an FGCI "tiny house." Last year, FGCI teams built their home in Vulcanesti, Moldova. Radic and his wife regularly attend worship at our ministry center in Nisporeni. This year, two more tiny homes were built for needy Roma families in Vulcanesti.

their own airline tickets and personal expenses for the (approximately) two-week trip (a total of around \$2,500-2,800). We are seeking team members for late-March/early-April or late-July building trips. Please contact me (Joel) if you're interested in traveling with us on a team next year.

At FGCI's Camp of the Good Shepherd, we had a wonderful summer season of Bible camps with more than 20 campers making decisions to receive Christ in baptism (17 young people were baptized at the campground). Praise God! During our "off season," we are focusing on a few long-awaited building projects, including: 1) adding an Annex to the Chapel that will provide men's and women's bathrooms, as well as a kitchenette. We have purchased a used double-wide manufactured home and are currently working to get the concrete foundation poured; 2) putting a large, covered concrete patio/entryway at the front of our Little Cedars Lodge building at the camp. This zero-entry patio/entryway will allow for handicap access by a ramp addition. It will also provide much-desired shade at the front of our building (a luxury we haven't had during all our years of owning the camp) and will have an area large enough for small group meetings under a shelter. We have secured initial plan approvals from Cass County building/zoning departments. Our hope is to get all of the concrete work done before the dead of winter, if at all possible.



FGCI purchased a used double-wide manufactured home that will soon serve as an annex to the Camp of the Good Shepherd chapel, providing restrooms, a kitchenette and a meeting room.

Our work in Romania with children in centers and with mentally challenged adults in government-operated institutions continues, though, this summer, we had to move our Sunshine (Therapy) Room ministry from Zebil to Tulcea, Romania. Also, Romania continues to shut down centers for children and to move these kids into smaller apartment-like centers with 12 or less children per location, due to European Union standards compliance.



Marius (the older) was one of FGCI's Little Lambs of the Lord center's kids more than 20 years ago when he was just a toddler. He has become a Christian and wants to evangelize among Turkish Muslim Roma people. Marius joined our FGCI camp team this summer in Moldova and Romania.

Finally, we continue to seek leaders to serve with our ministry, as I (Joel) have reached so-called "retirement age" and am trying to seek God's will for the future of FGCI. We need workers for assistance in our offices here in the States (FGCI and Camp of the Good Shepherd), and workers to serve overseas in our work in Romania, Moldova and with Ukrainians. Please pray for God to supply the workers we need for His harvest fields.

Many older kids still live in Romanian government-operated children's centers. We have known and served these children for many years. Pray for them to know Christ.



2) How has FGCI been investing resources provided by its supporters?

We continue to support our work in Romania, Moldova and with Ukrainians victimized by the Russia-Ukraine War. FGCI also owns and operates Camp of the Good Shepherd near Louisville, Nebraska.



FGCI is helping Ukrainians who are internally displaced in Ukraine. Since the War started in February of 2022, FGCI has been helping refugees and internally displaced people.

Over the past three-plus years, FGCI has invested much time, effort and dollars into caring for Ukrainian refugees, due to our proximity to the war in Ukraine and the tremendous number of refugees who have escaped into both Romania and Moldova. Hundreds of thousands of dollars of aid to Ukrainians has been given over the course of the War to date. The Russia-Ukraine War is currently not on most people's radar as "an emergency." Designated income for Ukrainian War victim relief has been very small in comparison to our monthly budget to provide aid to Ukrainians.

But, thanks to our generous supporters and some large gifts designated for Ukrainian relief, we have been continuing to provide \$8,000/month to help Ukrainians out of FGCI's General budget. And this does not include the Christian camps (\$130/person) and regular ministry and special projects (like: clothing for Ukrainian refugees for Christmas) that FGCI provides for the refugees. Over the past 3 and 1/2 years, a large percentage of FGCI's income and effort has gone toward helping Ukrainians victimized by the War.



Vlad visits a Roma (Gypsy) family for whom FGCI built a tiny house this year.

Through the blessing of a few large one-time gifts, FGCI has been able to help with building materials to build tiny houses in Moldova over the past two years. These tiny houses cost approximately \$20,000 apiece (for building materials). We would like to continue to build homes with US volunteers serving on FGCI teams.

Each month, FGCI sends a budget for our ministry at Home of the Good Shepherd (located in Nisporeni, Moldova) that includes salaries for our staff members in Moldova, plus expenses to cover housing costs, food, school and medical expenses for the children. This budget is approximately \$10,000/month. [Nisporeni is FGCI's ministry base in Moldova. Our Ministry Center located in the basement of our outbuilding at Home of the Good Shepherd is used weekly for Sunday worship and midweek Christian events.]

Ukrainian refugee boys enjoy Bible camp sponsored by FGCI in Moldova.



Our Camp of the Good Shepherd is regularly used by Christian ministries for their own events. With the income FGCI receives from groups using the camp, our operational expenses for staff and maintenance are covered. The only additional costs are for development and renovation. A few large, one-time gifts designated for Camp of the Good Shepherd over the past three years have allowed us to make repairs on CGS buildings and to do some needed renovations on our campus. Each year, FGCI leads and sponsors six sessions of graded Bible camps for children ages Pre-K through High School graduates. FGCI also sponsors specialty events for women's and men's groups.



Many lifelong friends are made during a week of Bible camp.



Morning devotions at camp are a great way to start the day, and to help build skills navigating through God's Word, the Bible.



Campers enjoy a little healthy family group competition.



Christ-centered, Bible-based worship and teaching open up campers' minds to the truths of Scripture.

Our work in Romania consists of our Sunshine (Therapy) Room ministry to mentally challenged adults and monthly visits to our children in centers. This is about \$2,000-2,500/month (not counting special needs or unexpected expenses), which covers staff, operating expenses and government fees.



Nela Aneni is FGCI's worker from Romania who serves in our eastern-Romania "Sunshine (therapy) Room," now relocated to Tulcea.

3) Name a couple of examples of the fruit that the ministry of FGCI has produced for Christ's Kingdom over the past year.

It was truly an exciting year of ministry and of seeing the fruit of our ministry—a ministry that has been building for 30 years. Let me tell you a few examples of God at work producing fruit.

I (Joel) was privileged to see several decisions for Christ be made and to baptize three individuals in Moldova in the spring (including one of our Home of the Good Shepherd boys). Later in summer, the remaining four of our Home of the Good Shepherd kids in Nisporeni were baptized. Praise God! Several Ukrainian refugee women and their children have made decisions to follow Christ over the past year. [I don't have an exact number, but most of the women we serve monthly and many of their older children are regularly attending worship/fellowship in the Chisinau, Moldova, area. In Ukraine, Vadim Sorochin, our ministry partner, has baptized dozens of believers and regularly is leading discipleship classes...many of these folks having been totally unchurched until the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine War.]



On the last day of Moldova Bible camp, several people attending came forward to give their lives to Christ.



This summer, FGCI helped to sponsor Bible camps for kids in Ukraine. Most of these children were unchurched with very little knowledge of anything related to Christ or God's Word.

Here in the States at our Bible camps this summer, we rejoiced as 17 young people chose Christ as Lord and Savior and were baptized at Camp of the Good Shepherd. I baptized one more after camp season and know of several others who were baptized later in their home churches. Praise God!!

We are also excited that some of the kids we have been serving for years, are now involved in Christian ministry and are stepping up to serve in God's Kingdom. Two boys that we have served for decades (Ruslan Jioltai and Mamut "Marius" Asan) have both expressed to me (Joel) their desire to enter into Christian/missionary

ministry. They have demonstrated their leadership in Christ's Kingdom to make disciples of Christ among Roma (Gypsy) people. We currently support both of these young men monthly with Christian education scholarships. Very exciting, indeed! Praise God!

We pray for more workers to join us in service in Moldova, Romania, with Ukrainians, and here in the States at Camp of the Good Shepherd.

In early December, I am scheduled to make my annual Christmas trip to visit the children and adults we serve in Romania, Moldova and Ukraine. During this visit we will be purchasing much-needed clothing for Ukrainian refugees living in the Chisinau, Moldova, area. If you would like to give a cash gift designated for this project (Clothes for Ukrainians Christmas Project), you may do so until the end of the year.

With all of the joy we've experienced seeing God produce fruit through our work over the past few years, we have also had our share of sorrow as we have seen the passing on of many of our good friends. Praise God that we don't grieve as those without the hope of the resurrection of Christ. Over the past few years, FGCI has received some generous gifts in memory of these wonderful Christians. We are so thankful that, even in death, these faithful brothers and sisters in Christ have blessed FGCI and the Kingdom of God. We are so thankful to the families who chose FGCI to be recipients of these memorial gifts.



Ukrainian refugee girls enjoy the peace and outdoors of FGCI's Moldova Bible camp. Many Ukrainian refugees have come to know Christ as Savior because of FGCI's work in Moldova.

Thank you so very much for your compassion (*splagchnizomai*) for the hurting children of God we serve. We appreciate your faithful financial and prayer support of For God's Children International.

Love in Jesus,

Joel Burkum

PS Vlad and Carolina Pogor (our FGCI-Moldova and -Romania representatives) are here at my house as I write this! [They are here to attend and participate in the wedding ceremony/reception of two of our FGCI team members who met while preparing for their trip to Romania/Moldova in July of 2024. We wish Hunter and Paige all the best as they begin their new lives as husband and wife. "Dumnezeu sa va binecuvanteze!". Vlad and Carolina wish to pass along their greeting to you all.



FGCI representative, Vlad Pogor, gets into the water action with our Moldova Bible camp campers.



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