

Dear friends,

This is our monthly newsletter. I hope the information we write here will help you better to understand what we are doing and how you can better help us by your prayers, financial support or even by visiting us and helping with some projects.

Children football tournament in Stepan village

During the last few years we have organized children's tournaments at Stepan (that's a big village where we have a children's team). Usually it takes place at Easter time. It is big event for the village when lots of people come to watch the children play. Everybody in the village knows that it is run by the church, because the coach of team is also the pastor of the local reformed church.

Usually we had 8 teams from different villages and towns in our region but also some guests from Belarus. The village head is very proud that his village can host such a tournament and usually comes to the tournament and we give her time to speak. A good thing about the tournament is that we, as organizers, can set the rules for the behaviour of coaches and the values of the tournament.

This is important because many coaches in Ukraine usually swear at children, bullying them, and try to cheat etc. But at this tournament they can see a different approach to competition. So we try to use this opportunity to change children's sport for the better. This year we moved the time of tournament and did it at the beginning of June on the Day of Defence of Children. We had 5 teams participating. Because of huge rain we couldn't run the tournament outside as usual but we were able to run it in a gym that was given to us by the local authority. It was great time and we can see that step by step we can change coaches' approach to children's sport in our region. Thanks to everyone who helps children to play sport!

Partnership with Rivne region FA

In my previous letter I wrote that head of FA of Rivne region wanted to develop a partnership between the FA and our organization. This week he proposed that we run the children's league for our region. There are currently 40 youth/children teams (U-15 and U-13) with potential involvement of children teams from all 16 districts in the Rivne region (from U-11 till U-17).

It is a big privilege and recognition of what we are doing. This league collapsed last season and didn't start at the right time so Rivne region FA hopes that we will help them to re-start it and develop it. For us it's a great chance to start it from the beginning with the right approach. It gives us a chance to set up codes of conduct for players, coaches, officials and parents (yes we still have fights sometimes between parents of competing teams). It will give us a chance to be responsible for setting the values of the tournament and to set up proper education for coaches etc. It is big responsibility so we need lots of prayer.

My role as member of Disciplinary Committee of Rivne region FA

For more than year I have this role and that gives me a clear understanding of what is going on in our football. It is a very sad picture. There are 4 other members of the committee. From what I can see, clubs, teams and coaches cheat a lot and don't understand what good competition is and what is poor sportsmanship.

They focus too much on winning at all costs. My role there is to try to help to solve conflicts between teams. Sometimes other members of the committee try to avoid solving conflict and making any decision because they are afraid of participants in the conflict.

Last time we had case when one team at au Under 15s tournament of U-15 played a goalkeeper who was 18 years old. Another team which lost and made the appeal couldn't provide evidence of an overage player playing.

Although members of the committee understood that it could happen (because of the coach's history of such things) they didn't want to make any decision, because one club belongs to the Rivne nuclear power station (which is a big sponsor of regional football) and other club is run by another very influential person.

So for me it was a chance to tell them that our entire bad situation in the country is not because of bad government, but because we accept corruption among us, and it was great chance to remind them quote of Burke: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing". Finally they took some steps in order to find the truth and punish the guilty. Unfortunately we were not able to gather evidence of cheating but at least we tried to do what the Disciplinary Committee should do.

News from team in Barmakee (small village near Rivne)

For 4 years we have had a team in this village. The children came to us when they were 11 years old and stayed until they were 15. One of coaches (Igor German) moved to live in that village where he also took the role of youth minister at a local church there.

We had to stop to running the team there for several reasons. Igor (coach) married and needed to find an extra job to be able to support his family. The club from another big village (where is there us a sports hall and the opportunity to play during the winter and participate at a higher level) invited our players to play for them and most of the players chose that option.

On the one hand we we were sad about this, but from another side we glad that a bigger football club (compared to ours) had invited them and they got more opportunity play football and develop their skills. But most important thing, I believe was that some of the people from our children's/teenagers' team came to some youth meetings in the church which Igor is leading. And one person decided to go regularly to church and be baptized in that church. And that is really big and brave decision when you live in small village. Also after a break Igor also was able to start a new team. So from September we will start a new team U-10 there.

New starts in our ministry, new challenges

This September we will celebrate the 7th year of our ministry. 7 years ago we set up some children's teams in 4 locations of Rivne and villages in the Rivne region. Now children move on to youth and adult teams. During these years we taught them how to play football and also taught them Bible principles for their life. Now we have a new start. Since September we set up new children's teams in the same locations.

We are starting with 10 year olds and we will have another 7 years to be with them and teach them. But this time we would like to do more for them. With life in Ukrainian villages there are many problems that are apparent. There is bad education, medicine, no opportunities for proper entertainment, no work etc. So children from villages have less opportunity in life than children from cities. So we would like to change a bit our approach to children's football in villages.

Yes we will still have football practices, yes we will still have Bible principles lessons and values lessons as we did for the last 7 years. But this time we would like to add for children 1-2 English lessons per week, 1 lesson of computer skills per week, and once per month a book club (so they will read through the

year 12 books which will develop their world view). Of course that is a big work in front of us, we will need more volunteers, more resources but we have a great task and we looking forward how God will use us to make impact to lives of these children.

Briefly about some aspects of situation in Ukraine

I will send bigger update on situation Ukraine next time. But here are just few things I would like to share with you to praise our God.

In Ukraine for many years was religious freedom and more or less good relationships between different denominations. But this entire situation – Revolution of dignity (Majdaan) and Ukrainian –Russian war united people more than ever. When Crimea was occupied by Russia, they started to persecute Ukrainian Orthodox Church there. As result Muslims of Crimea opened their mosques for Ukrainian Orthodox Churches to have worship services on Sunday there. Amazing.

In Donetsk Russian terrorists were kidnapping and killing different priests there. They already killed a few protestants pastors there and kidnapped a few more protestants pastors, Roman Catholic, Ukrainian orthodox and Greek Catholic priests. After that happened the Muslim imam did a huge work in order to find them and help to set them free. In many cities interdenominational prayer meetings are taking place regularly. Now according to polls those whom people trust most is the Church!

For many years Ukrainians didn't support financially charitable organizations and didn't have the tradition to volunteer. But now in Ukraine massive volunteers movements are developing and also people are donating massive amounts of money. Yes, at this moment mostly it goes to the needs of the army, or to help victims of violence power or wounded soldiers. But I believe that Ukrainians will continue this new useful after this war.

Need for computers

In the previous newsletter I wrote about our wonderful partnership with a school in Rivne which gives us enough time in the sports gym for our practices. They need to set up a computer class for pupils. Due to situation in Ukraine they can't get money from local government so have to search for sponsors. I would like to ask you if you know somebody who can help with this please connect with me. They need 10 computers (there is no need for new computers but it should be relevant to today's needs).

Also for our programme for the holistic development of our children players, we need to have 5-7 laptops (also there is no need for new laptops). So if you have ideas how we can solve that need please contact me.

What is our needs and how you can help us?

By prayers. Please pray for:

Our financial situation. Now we can't do a lot because of lack of resources
New volunteer coaches
Children and adults who are in our teams. That God will open their hearts for Him.
Possibility to change corruption and bad approach to children and to sport in our region.

By donations.

We face really hard financial situation and lack of support breaks our development.
We see lots of challenges we need be there but because of lack of resources we can't influence there and answer.
We are looking for 30-50 people who can take commitment to support us by 25-50 pounds. If you have desire to support us please contact me and we will discuss all needed information for this (dontsovh@yahoo.com)

Come and help us.

We are looking for short-term people who can help us with camps and tournament (usually during the summer). We are also looking for people who can teach children English, computer skills, any other knowledge that can help children in future.

We are looking for long term volunteers who can be a coach in some villages we work with. There are many requests from churches from villages that want to set up children football teams but have lack of people who can be coaches. We also need people who can teach children English, computer skills, any other knowledge that can help children in future.

We are looking for people who can help us with PR, fundraising, running website and facebook page of our ministry.

Zhenya Dontsov
Executive director of Standard Sport.