

On World Communion Sunday, October 1, Alla Soroka, PCUSA International Peacemaker, gave a presentation at Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Milwaukee. Alla works with orphans and other at-risk children in her native Odessa, Ukraine. The presentation was part of a Mission Committee Brunch at Immanuel, and part of a series of events within the Presbytery of Milwaukee, all sharing Alla's message.

To explain why she is a peacemaker, Alla said that before she was 30 years old, she lived life according to her personal choice. After that, it was God's will that she followed.

She was trained in the peace program "Alternatives to Violence," a project from the American Quakers. The program is designed for prison work; Alla went to work in prisons. She had a dark side, a troubled feeling about what the prisons represented and how they functioned. God gradually brought her to more of a middle ground.

She met Robert Gamble, the Presbyterian minister. He helped street children, and was the director of "This Child Here." The organization pays for the needs of street children. Many of these children escaped from orphanages. There was a movement to teach in orphanages how kids can see good aspects of each other during difficult times. Alla began to work with foster agencies to prepare foster parents to care for children with special needs.

Adoptive or foster families don't want teens, they seek younger children. Alla began a training program for mentors to teach teens to accept society. It functioned similarly to Big Brothers Big Sisters.

In 2014, there were 25,000 refugees in the Ukraine, due to military conflict in the eastern part of the country. Alla began a new program with refugee families, a peace and reconciliation camp for the displaced. It has occurred for three summers since 2014. There are now 70 people in the program.

This year, there is a new program: "Our New Generation." The program is children to children, teens to teens, peacemaking being the theme. The participants are taught to be school peacemakers.

A common denominator in the programs is the concept of "this child here," not that child over there. With orphans, prisoners, and refugees, God is very close, to whomever is in Alla's presence, and she and her colleagues work with whomever is nearby.

Alla closed by inviting us to pray for each other as part of the body of Christ.

For more information:

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/peacemaking/international-peacemakers/>

Photos follow.





