

MISSION AND OUTREACH

Spotlight on:

Our Sister Church in Russia

For a week in late February, Oxford Presbyterian Church was blessed by a visit with Bishop Igor Maksakov as a representative from our sister church in Zlatoust, Russia. During the 2019 Russia Mission Partnership journey, five members from Oxford Presbyterian Church learned of an outreach our sister church in Zlatoust has with those in their community who live with cognitive and developmental disabilities. We also learned that the churches around Chelyabinsk seek to faithfully respond in their region to the global challenge of drug & alcohol addiction.

For Igor's visit in February, we sought to create learning journeys that might elevate an exchange of ministry ideas as we deepen our mutual mission partnership. We visited a needle exchange and harm reduction program in Middletown. Later in the day, we meet with the director and staff of a drug and alcohol addiction treatment center in Hamilton. At both locations we felt the safety and care of true sanctuaries for body, mind and soul.

Later in the week, we toured Safe Haven Farms. Safe Haven is a community of choice for adults with autism and other developmental disabilities over a setting of 60 beautiful acres. Walking over along the stables in the barn, through the green houses, and into the day programs at the Hatton Center, we felt the holy ground beneath our feet. Since this was Igor's fifth visit to OPC, dating back to 2004, it was a reunion with old friends as well as an introduction to new friends. We learned again of his walk with Christ. Igor became a Christian when he listened every night at 10:45 p.m. to an evangelist on Voice of America with his grandmother in the mid 1980's. When he was 18 and had to enter military service, his grandmother told him to pray with her at 10:45 p.m. every night regardless of the time zone he was in. He did so all throughout his military service.

Igor's time in Oxford was richly filled with worship, fellowship, learning and shopping (yes, Igor did purchase shoes!) and much more including: Shrove Tuesday Pancake Dinner, Ash Wednesday dinner and worship, tours of Kumler Chapel and the Freedom Summer Memorial, as well as an Miami University hockey game.

A true highlight of the visit took place during our luncheon on Saturday. Following a delicious meal, Igor shared with the gathered community the

latest news from our sister church in Zlatoust. As Igor's news for us drew to a close, representatives from the church stepped forward to share very exciting news with him.

At that time we presented Igor with the total gifts raised for the renovation of the church facility in Zlatoust. So great was his surprise and gratitude, Igor found himself without words for the first time throughout all the years of our partnership. The luncheon ended with all those present blessing Igor, the gift he carried to our sister church and our brothers and sisters in that ministry as they carry out the good news of Jesus Christ.

Carol Schaber and Pastor Lawrence

