

NOW IS THE

Being a young Latter-day Saint in Ukraine means serving and leading in the Church—right now.

BY JANESEA CLOWARD

Imagine being a member of the Church in a place where everyone is a convert. Missionaries have been here for only a few years. And when you turn 17, instead of becoming Laurel president, you are called to be Primary president.

For Oksana Fersanova, that's exactly what the Church is like. Oksana, who lives in Khmel'nyts'kyy, Ukraine, was



one of the first people to be baptized when her city opened for missionary work in 2006. Not long after her baptism she was called to serve as Primary president for the small group

that meets in her city.

Oksana is typical of Latter-day Saint teenagers throughout the Church here—deeply involved in serving and eager to share the truth in a land where the message of the gospel is now taking hold. In areas like Khmel'nyts'kyy, the young converts provide energy, optimism, and unwavering testimonies of the gospel, which strengthen the Church in Ukraine.

Waiting for the Gospel

Oksana had a testimony of Jesus Christ, but it wasn't until her friends gave her a copy of the Book of Mormon that she gained a testimony of His restored gospel.

"As I read about Jesus Christ talking to the Nephites, a strong feeling came over me, and I knew that He loved

me. I prayed and had a witness that He is my Savior and the Book of Mormon is true," Oksana says.

"I knew that if Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon and the Book of Mormon was true, he was definitely a prophet of God and had restored the gospel of Jesus Christ," she says.

Her friends taught her more about the gospel because there were no missionaries in Khmel'nyts'kyy at that time. For four years she studied the gospel and lived its principles as best as she could, praying for the missionaries to come.

Finally, in March 2006, they came. Oksana and her friend Sasha Kubatov were the first two people baptized in Khmel'nyts'kyy.

Sasha was only 14 when he received a Book of Mormon from his older sisters, who had joined the Church in another city.



TIME



“They emphasized the fact that I was 14, just as Joseph Smith was when he had his First Vision. He was greatly blessed at a young age, and I could be too,” he says.

So he started reading. He read until he got to the Isaiah chapters in 2 Nephi, and then he stopped. He read the Book of Mormon again a year later, but as a historical document, not with a desire to know if it was true.

But when he read the Book of Mormon the third time, Sasha focused less on its history and more on the work of God it recorded.

“As I read it, I thought it was true, but I didn’t have a firm testimony yet,” he admits. “I wanted to talk to the missionaries.”

When the elders arrived a few years later, they answered all of his questions and helped him prepare to be baptized and confirmed.

“As I walked into the waters of baptism, all my doubts were gone, and I knew that Joseph Smith was a prophet and the gospel is true,” he says. “I was not afraid, even though I knew the rest of my life would be different.”

His life *is* different now. As a home teacher Sasha is learning how to magnify the priesthood he holds and serve in the Lord’s kingdom.

Within a year of his baptism Sasha baptized his mother and his grandfather. His entire family has now joined the Church, and Sasha is excited to bring the gospel to others.

“I am preparing to serve a mission so that I can preach the gospel and bring someone else to God,” he says. “His work must go forward.”

Opposite page: *Oksana Fersanova, a convert to the Church, loves teaching Primary. A group of children in Chernihiv hold up issues of the Liahona. Left: Sasha Kubatov shared the gospel with his family and is now preparing to serve in the Russia Yekaterinburg Mission. Below: The city center of L'viv.*





Above: After being baptized at age 16, Misha says of his confirmation, "I felt power come to me as hands were laid on my head, and I felt awesome." Right: Misha baptized his mother, Olga, six months after he was baptized. Bottom: Missionaries, branch members, and family supported Olga on the day of her baptism. Opposite page: Yuri Voynarovich loves serving as branch mission leader and clerk.



Following His Lead

Misha Sukonosov never imagined that attending English classes with the missionaries in Chernihiv would lead him to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. But that changed after several months of attending the classes.

Misha loved the spirit he felt as the missionaries taught him English. And when he finally accepted their invitation to attend Church meetings with them, he was surprised to feel the same spirit at church.

Finally, one of the elders invited Misha to simply do what he knew was right and be baptized.

Misha knew it would take a great deal

of courage to go against his family's traditions. In Ukraine most people are lifelong members of the predominant church. His family was no exception.

His mother wanted him to wait a few years to be baptized, so he agreed to wait until he turned 16. In the meantime he attended church every week and began serving as branch pianist.

"That helped me come every Sunday, because I had to come or there would be nobody to play," Misha says.

Finally, when the wait was over, Misha was baptized in the Desna River on July 1, 2006. At the time, he had no idea how quickly his family would follow his example.

His mother, Olga, started coming to church to learn more about her son's new religion. She came so often that the branch president asked her to play the organ in sacrament meeting so Misha could be called as the music director.



After six months of hearing the members' testimonies, including her son's, Olga developed a testimony of her own. Misha baptized his mother in December 2006.

Olga still plays the organ every week. Misha, now 17, keeps busy by helping the branch presidency, serving as a branch missionary, and leading the hymns in sacrament meeting.

"I know the Church needs me," he says. "I am so grateful for these chances to serve. The Church helps me as I help others."

Finding the Faith

In L'viv, a city in western Ukraine, Yuri Voynarovich and his family started searching for truth when he was just 10 years old. For years they visited different churches. Then his uncle invited them to attend a branch of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Yuri's parents were soon baptized and confirmed.

"I didn't go at first," Yuri says. "I kept searching on my own."



But his parents, who knew the Church was true, didn't give up on their son. They invited Yuri to English lessons and youth activities as well as Sunday meetings. Finally, the missionaries themselves invited him to English classes.

"I couldn't say no to them," Yuri says. So he went. Then he went to church. Eventually he too was baptized.

"Since that day I've had many more experiences that have built and molded my testimony and character into who I am today," he says.

"I often see people who suffer from bad choices they've made," he says. "I understand sometimes it's hard because of temptations and peer pressure, but we shouldn't give up. Later we can see the blessings that come from obedience."

Yuri, now 17, serves as the branch mission leader and branch clerk in L'viv.

"I am so thankful for the Church and all it has done for me," Yuri says. "I love this Church. I encourage everyone to hold to the iron rod and never let go." **NE**