

## A Disciplined Church in Ukraine by Ed Kline

Sometimes we wonder what a people of God would be like if they lived their faith without the fellowship of other Anabaptists to support them. If a group of believers had only the Bible to guide them, how would their practice compare to ours? There is such a church in Ukraine. Ed Kline visited this community of believers and then told about their doctrine and practices at the 2010 Anabaptist Identity Conference. In this issue of Anabaptist Voice, we want to introduce how these churches came into being and then look particularly at how they view and exercise church discipline.

A Disciplined Church in Ukraine  
Taken from “The Ukrainian Amish and Their  
Worldview” by Ed Kline.

“Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it” Luke: 11:28.

I’ll tell you a story. It is a story of a group of believers that was discovered in southern Ukraine in the last couple of years.

I need to make it clear that these people have no German, Swiss or Anabaptist background; they are an ethnic Slavic people from the area in which they live. These people have come to a faith in Christ Jesus that is very similar to a conservative Anabaptist position. My wife and I and other friends visited these people in July of 2009. They live about 100 miles from the Romanian border in the foothills of the Carpathian mountains in the Dniester River Valley. Their community is very secluded; it took us three hours of tedious riding to travel 90 miles.

### Some Description of Their Lifestyle

We knew that we had arrived at one of the villages where these people lived—not everyone in the village was a believer— because we saw men and boys wearing little hats. The people made these hats out of corduroy with a floppy top and a small bill. We learned the menfolk wear these hats for religious reasons and as a mark of separation.

One could recognize the ladies by the fact that they wore long skirts, mostly plain, and had a heavy scarf on their heads as a headship veiling. Interestingly, the

unmarried sisters wore their scarves tied in the front;  
married sisters tied theirs in the back.

We discovered that these people are very self-sufficient. They raise virtually all their food. They don't have motors, electricity, or telephones. At home, they do virtually everything by hand.

They made it clear to us that their separation from the world and their rejection of technology was for the sake of following Christ. They felt they would compromise a simple faith in Christ if they would be part of the world.

How the Churches Came into Being

I asked them about their background and how they got started. Here is what they told me.

In 1914, a man from their village was sent to Siberia and put in a concentration camp. During the eight years he was in the camp, he got to know another prisoner who was a Christian believer. Through the Christian believer's testimony this community man became converted. We're almost certain the prisoner in Siberia was a Mennonite or an Anabaptist, because when this brother returned to his home town in 1929, he believed in separation from the world, nonresistance, a strong brotherhood, the ban and excommunication. He also had a strong sense of holiness of life and discipleship.

The point for us: sometimes we are called to witness under very difficult conditions. Today, because of one prisoner's faithful witness in Siberia, 3000 people are serving Jesus 83 years later!

This man came back to his native village in 1929 and, without a Bible, started preaching the new birth on the streets. The result was people being converted and the church being started. In 1940 a man from the Orthodox Church became a Christian. For 3 years and 40 days he struggled with his carnal nature and eventually experienced victory over his sinful nature and then asked for baptism. This man married a young woman in their community and later became the church leader in the 1950's.

The church began in 1929 when the prisoner returned from Siberia. Because of communism and isolation, the churches had no Bibles for 15-20 years. In the mid 1940's, a man by the name of Aneschenko brought Bibles to them. Aneschenko had been converted in a Mennonite village 1,000 miles to the east, and married a girl from a pietist

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offshoot of the Mennonites (Stundists).<sup>1</sup> Aneschenko's father-in-law gave him a Bible and somehow God used Aneschenko to introduce the Bible to these churches.

Repentance, Baptism, and the Ban. Let me tell you a little about their philosophy of salvation. They were very clear that salvation comes through faith in Christ Jesus, along with repentance. They also added, "If a person doesn't repent, he is not fit to be baptized and become a part of the church of the Kingdom."

They instruct their applicants for baptism. They teach against the sins of backbiting, covetousness, envy, anger, immoral thoughts, idolatry, and adultery. If their young people are not clear on these things, the church leaders do not baptize them.

The age at which someone is baptized depends on their spiritual maturity; some are 16 and some a lot older. A strong evidence of repentance is required before anyone is baptized.

They explained how they deal with backbiting, slander, and gossip. If someone repeats something about another person that isn't true and it becomes an issue—in a close group like theirs it will become an issue—he has to go before the congregation and state what he said. Then he has to say it wasn't true and state what is the truth. The offender must make this same statement in the churches of all four regions where they live—their churches are comprised of 3000 people in eight churches. The one who told us about this practice made a simple statement, "It works." I believe it does.

Like the Anabaptists, they believe repentance is not just a mental assent, but a process by which a man brings forth fruits worthy of repentance, fruit that can be seen. They really stress victory over the carnal nature and the sins of the spirit. They teach that once a person has victory over his carnal nature, where he will be able to forgive his enemies and forgive those who wrong him, this is evidence he has received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

They do excommunicate and exercise the ban. However, both are used very cautiously and reluctantly. They said, "When someone errs, strays, and becomes dissatisfied, we have spent years working with such a person. We find if we put in enough effort and enough prayer, most erring people can be won back. "But if we do excommunicate someone and put them under the ban, we do not invite such a person into our

house or eat with them or have anything to do with them. In the course of our existence, we have excommunicated only a few people.”

But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who calls himself a Christian who is sexually immoral, or greedy, or an idolater, or verbally abusive, or a drunkard, or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person (I Corinthians 5:11).

If people won't agree to this teaching, don't welcome them into your home or even greet them. Greeting them is the same as taking part in their evil deeds (II John 1:10-11). Here was a real lesson to me; the ban can be redemptive. In the history of Anabaptist groups, the use of the ban has been one of the most controversial issues that has ever come up. But it works for these people and we can learn about its use from them.

Hear the rest of this fascinating story at:  
[www.AnabaptistsLive.com](http://www.AnabaptistsLive.com), Select “The Ukrainian Amish and Their Worldview.”

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