

European Initiative



March 2013

Global suicide central. That describes Eastern Europe. Many places the USSR suffocated, now have no spiritual root or church centered support. In icy January we began initiating RiskRide (suicide-preventative evangelistic project) into Europe, sharing the vision in seven countries: UK, France, Spain, Belgium, Hungary, Ukraine, Lithuania. What began as an attempt to aid Japanese Christians to provide emotional care and share Christ, has continued its global spread. Japan...a suicide hot-bed itself—the being made-in-Japan aspect of the project seems to add a special glimmer for other places plagued with hopelessness.

UKRAINE (#10 Suicide Nation)

Ukraine's neighbors Belarus and Russia score higher with suicide, but both pose more challenges in access. Ukraine on the other hand is easy to get into and easy to move around. Perhaps Ukraine could be a door into the others...that was the initial draw. But unforeseen, Ukraine has a lot of connectedness to Japan. Both countries



Orienting team members in Ukraine. Nikolay on the far left.

have endured nuclear meltdown.

My host Nikolay oversees Campus Crusade's evangelism for the whole country. Together we visited the Chernobyl museum in Kiev. A first for him. It turned out he grew up at the foot of Chernobyl where his father worked. They were evacuated when Nikolay was 11. The museum walls were plastered with pictures of his childhood. Scanning the walls he pointed out, "I know these people, they are all dead." At the entrance to the museum was a memorial to Fukushima and a poem about the chestnuts of Ukraine crying out to the cherry blossoms of Japan (their respective symbolic trees). Spiritually Ukraine was blasted wide open when Russia left. But the opportunity for the Gospel has been closing ever since. There is still time for harvest...perhaps RiskRide can help.



Sobering visit ...

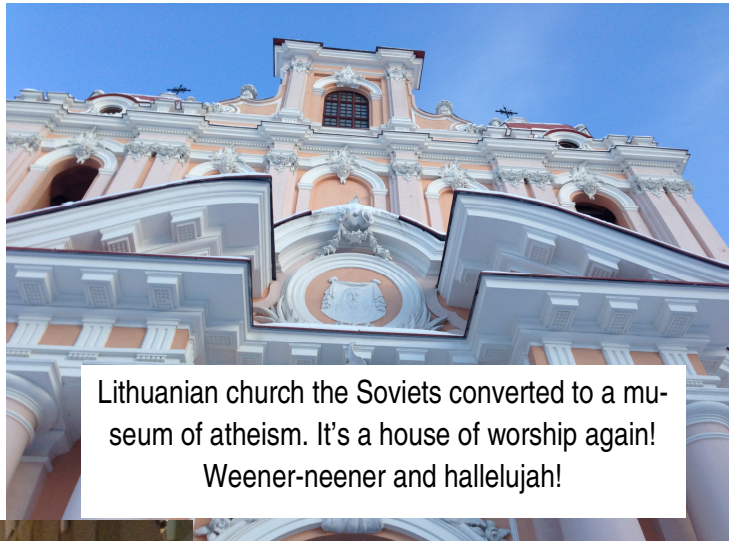
The Chernobyl Museum, Kiev, Ukraine.

BELGIUM (#16 Suicide Nation)

Chocolate, beer, diamonds. That is about all I knew regarding Belgium. But the Catholic education headquarters eagerly invited me to come. Certainly it was intimidating to meet one of their advisors, a professor-emeritus specializing in suicide and connected with the World Health Organization. But he was thrilled with the RiskRide idea and offered to advocate for getting it initiated into their university programs, which are 60% of the higher education. Some of the headquarters staff hesitated because of the spiritual aspect of the tool, but others argued about "how can we call ourselves Catholic and not mention God". If the RiskRide program takes off in Belgium it might be something like training Catholics to share the Gospel! Pretty amazing! Oh, and one other thing about Belgium—waffles—and they are good.

LITHUANIA (#1 Suicide Nation)

When I asked young men on the street in Vilnius about suicide they had no hesitation to tell me, "We are the world champions!" All during my visit that reality seemed incongruent. Lithuania was a pastel wonder-world. If you ever plan a trip to Europe consider Lithuania—of any country I have visited there, it is the most charming. A delightful place but with a dreadful poison.



Lithuanian church the Soviets converted to a museum of atheism. It's a house of worship again!
Weener-neener and hallelujah!



Night in Lithuania. Suicide is dominantly rural and male (man/woman ratio 6:1 !)

At the Youth Psychological Aid Center staff told me it takes 30 attempts to get through on the suicide hotline...People at the end of the rope

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have no where to go. I anticipate returning to Lithuania in April. Perhaps help the small team there to train, make connections with available social services, find funding for the initiative, whatever God will have. Please pray...

