

Ukrainian WCU student relies on faith while in different cultures

By Chris Doyle

International Mission Board

He stood in front of a group of children sharing a Bible lesson during Holiday Club. Churches in Australia have Holiday Clubs instead of Vacation Bible Schools, and this was one of the activities Danylo “Daniel” Ibrahimov led as a summer missionary with the International Mission Board at a church in Albany, Western Australia.

His other duties with the church included discipling students in small groups and playing guitar with the worship team. Ibrahimov and other college students were hosted by IMB missionaries Ken and Kathy Woods who host summer missionaries every year. But what makes Ibrahimov unique compared to other summer missionaries is his journey getting to Australia.

Ibrahimov is the son of a Ukrainian pastor. His family evacuated their home in Kyiv when war broke out in 2022, and they lived briefly in western Ukraine. Eventually, they moved to Germany where a new church of Ukrainian refugees was planted.

Ibrahimov’s father became the founding pastor of the church in Germany, and Ibrahimov actively served the church with his family. He credits much of his spiritual growth to his parents who helped him grow in his faith in Jesus Christ.

“Even if I face hardships, I keep my foundation on the Bible, living out biblical principles,” he said.

Living in Germany helped Ibrahimov realize God’s plans for him

were not limited by culture or country borders. He was considering options for college and received a recommendation from IMB missionary Michael Domke who has worked with his father in church planting work over the years. Domke made it possible for Ibrahimov to attend William Carey University in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and be roommates with Domke's son, Michael, Jr.

"We didn't have many options," Ibrahimov said. "I couldn't go back to Ukraine because of war circumstances, so I decided to go to Mississippi. I believe God led me here."

In August 2022, Ibrahimov enrolled at William Carey, and he became more dependent on God. He was in a completely different culture and learning a new language, but it didn't take long for Ibrahimov to fit in.

He got a job working in the campus post office, and he made friends easily. One of his coworkers is also an international student who is not a Christian. Ibrahimov has frequent conversations with her, often sharing the gospel.

The Baptist Student Union on campus has been a great support for Ibrahimov. Landon Adams, BSU director at William Carey, has seen Ibrahimov handle many high-pressure situations with calmness and grace.

"Everybody loves Daniel," Adams said. "He thrives in small group settings where he can invest in people. He is a dedicated kingdom servant who does not care about status or being seen and heard by everyone. He never seeks attention, but he always seeks ways to serve and invest in others."

Because he is an international student, Ibrahimov has limited opportunities on what to do during summer breaks. He has a student visa, which allows him to live and work on William Carey's campus.

His passion for missions led him to become a BSU summer

missionary through the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, but there were challenges. Being from Ukraine raised concerns, given the country's war-torn condition. Many of the countries where he wanted to go for the summer would not permit Ibrahimov to come.

One opportunity that drew Ibrahimov's interest was serving in Australia. He went through the process to pursue a visa, which was denied in his first attempt.

Jennie Taylor, MBCB associate director of collegiate ministries, was a liaison for Ibrahimov, trying to keep communication going between him and those involved in the visa process. Taylor "worked tirelessly" to facilitate the process of getting Ibrahimov to Australia, according to the timeline set by the field.

If the visa fell through, Taylor would be able to reassign him to another BSU summer missions location. Ibrahimov was considering "Plan B" options and was ready to be reassigned if needed.

"There was a lot of stress involved, but Daniel is cool under pressure," Adams said. "'Steady' is a word I use to describe him, steady under pressure."

Ibrahimov had a plane ticket and other arrangements in place for him to serve in Australia for the summer. Taylor helped him in Mississippi; Kathy Woods helped him in Australia. Three days before departure, Ibrahimov got his visa.

"That was a huge lesson of trusting God," he said. Ibrahimov spent nine weeks serving at the Western Australia church.

"Daniel fit in well at the church he served," Woods said. "He seems to adapt in all environments. He's gone to Germany. He's come to Australia. God has opened doors for him, and he makes the most of every opportunity."



Daniel Ibrahimov speaks at a Holiday Club, similar to Vacation Bible School, while doing summer missions at a church in Australia. (Photo credit: Daniel Ibrahimov)

Currently a junior at William Carey, Ibrahimov is majoring in business management with a Christian studies minor. He plans to pursue full-time ministry after he graduates, possibly in church planting. What is important for Ibrahimov is to see people grow in their relationship with God.

“I met a student from Kazakhstan and was able to have a conversation with him,”

Ibrahimov said. “He grew up in a Muslim household, and that helped lead the conversation into a gospel-related topic.”

Intense situations have happened in Ibrahimov’s life, but none of these experiences has caused his faith in Jesus Christ to waiver. Instead, he found ways to share the gospel with people in various cultures.

The IMB works with Baptist state conventions to send summer missionaries every year. Just as Taylor helped Ibrahimov get to Australia last summer, she works with other college students who serve with the IMB in mission work all over the world. Last summer, 54 of the 120 summer missionaries sent out by Mississippi Baptists served IMB assignments.

Thousands of college students use their summer break to reach the lost with IMB missionary teams. In 2023, nearly 250 IMB summer missionaries served in Europe. The IMB offers numerous, inexpensive ways for students to serve each summer in Europe, Africa, Asia, the Americas, and many other places all over the world, including Australia.

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