

## Ukraine

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While Baima's husband prepared to fight in the war, she has been doing her part to rally people and groups to take action to restore peace to Ukraine. She has written family, friends and others in hopes they would support proven relief efforts and take up calls to action. She is also urging people in America to call their representatives and senators.

"In some ways, she and I have had a similar life's purpose," Lanny Westphal said. "I have always been working strongly for understanding and peace between nations and peoples."

Lanny's Illinois congregation is getting behind several Ukrainian support measures laid out by a Lutheran bishop. They access existing organizations, including Lutheran World Relief that is asking for donations to provide resources such as emergency food, water, shelter, and medical supplies for Ukraine.

Lanny has also contacted his representatives and senators in the state of Wisconsin where he lives with his wife, Mary.

### Baima inspired by Salk teacher, Russian language camps, that helped her pursue her dreams

Baima moved to Ukraine in 2014 to teach young children in a country populated with bilingual and trilingual Ukrainians. "After only a few days, I fell in love with my new country," she said.

The seeds of Baima's journey through life were sown as a young girl attending what was then Salk Middle School in Elk River in 1985. Her then social studies teacher Su Arnold taught her class a bit about the Soviet Union.

"This was about the same time that Rocky IV came out," Baima recalls. "Our teacher showed us that the Soviet Union was made up of people like us; the movie showed us that the Soviet Union was evil. I chose to believe my teacher, and decided to study the Russian language. My teenage



The couple's ram, Prince Caspian, showing off his "terrible table manners."



Submitted photos

Yurii Potapenko and Diane (Westphal) Baima enjoying themselves at a lavender farm in Ternovka, Ukraine.

self hoped that learning a language could help bring peace to the world."

That desire opened her up to the whole world. A school counselor then recommended Concordia Language Villages, and her "dear mom" paid for her to attend Russian camp for two summers while in high school. There she met people who became friends and mentors who she has remained connected to throughout her life.

After high school, Westphal studied Russian at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and dreamed of teaching the Russian language.

"I wanted to give the gift of language and culture to a new generation," she said. "The Cold War had ended, and there was work to be done. If the world could understand each other, I reasoned, peace could last."

She suffered a setback, however. When she took a proficiency test, a Russian professor told her that she did not have the aptitude to learn the language.

"I was devastated, but not completely," said Baima, who has been a student of life.

After graduating from college, she moved to South Korea to teach English. There, she made friends with Russians who were also working in Seoul.

"They inspired me to study again," she said.

In 1997, she moved to Moscow to work and dedicate herself to learning the language.

"I had the most wonderful support from my teacher, and Russian and American friends," she said. "In two years, I was ready to enter Moscow State

University's master's program offered through the school's linguistics department."

She found she loved living in Moscow, especially given the chance to visit museums and the theater. She and a friend traveled around to visit the old cities and monasteries. "My favorites were 11th century cathedrals," she said.

For her schooling, she remembers sitting in a cold room with other students from around the world. Her closest schoolmate was a person from China. This woman taught Russian at a university in Beijing, and her husband worked at the Chinese Embassy in Moscow.

"I was achieving my dream, both academically with the intensity of the classes, and personally, as I was part of Russian, Chinese and USA discussions every day," she said. "The Russian language was our conduit for 'peace talks' as we solved the problems of the world and practiced grammar exercises."

After completing her degree in 2001, she moved back to the United States a couple months before 9/11. She couldn't find a job using her Russian language skills, so she went back to teaching English, first in St. Paul and then in Milwaukee.

While she lived in the United States, she always worked with immigrants.

"I was lucky to have a job where my students and colleagues would teach me about their cultures, as I helped them learn English and life skills in the USA," she said.

After 10 years of doing this, she concluded she was ready



Diane (Westphal) Baima with Dolly, one of the many animals on Baima's family farm in Ukraine.

for new horizons. She moved to Armenia to teach at an international school, and then transferred to Kyiv, Ukraine after three years.

"My first days in Ukraine shocked me," she said. "I had expected another smileless, somber former Soviet Republic, but I found Kyiv full of friendly and optimistic people. This was the summer after the 2014 Maidan Revolt which led to the Russian invasion of

eastern Ukraine and Crimea. In the midst of this terrible loss, I hadn't expected so much positive energy. I felt bad that I only spoke very basic Ukrainian, but people switched to Russian without a blink when they heard my simplistic attempts to communicate."

In Ukraine, Westphal found everything she had been searching for in Russia. She