

# Dr. Gary Reusche



**C**an you imagine hiding in a basement because your home could be bombed? That's life for lots of kids in Ukraine since Russia invaded the country in early 2022. But in a small village in central Ukraine, Gary Reusche and his wife, Svetlana, show kids a different way of life. Since 2012, they've run a camp on their farm for kids and youth. It focuses on building life skills and community while exploring virtues and the arts.

As a teenager in Virginia, U.S., in the 1960s, Gary wanted to help others, so he joined a service project feeding kids in need. When a friend told him about the Bahá'í Faith, he was attracted to its message of justice. He became a Bahá'í at age 19. Gary explored the U.S. and Central America by motorcycle, which fueled his desire to be of service. He went to college, earning a doctorate degree in agronomy (soil and seed science). Over the years, Gary worked in about 70 countries, teaching farmers better ways to grow and store crops. Since 2003, he's lived in Ukraine, where his family provides a safe haven for kids in wartime.

**Q: What's one of your favorite childhood memories?**

A: We square danced. And I was a fanatic when I was seven or eight years old . . . [I loved] the music, being with other children, and the happiness we felt.

**Q: What was the most challenging experience for you as a kid?**

A: I think it was . . . problems with my parents, because [they] were not very happy together. When I was about seven years old, . . . my father ended up going off to work in Southeast Asia for a couple of years . . . My mother had to do everything . . . [But] my sister loved sports and basically got me involved . . . That was very good for me.



At age 13, Gary lived near an Air Force base in southern Illinois, U.S., and played many sports, including basketball, baseball, and football.

**Q: What is agronomy?**

A: There's two parts of it . . . One is growing food . . . learning about seeds, how to take care of the soil, do the planting, and grow crops . . . Business is the second part . . . selling together, working together, and finding ways to improve the quality of our community.

**Q: Please tell us about the work you've done to help farms develop.**

A: In 70 countries . . . we taught them to improve their production and storage and to improve . . . being able to sell this food to other countries . . . The world is going to have trouble producing food for everybody . . . We're using too much of the earth's resources . . . This has to change.

Questions and  
Answers with an  
Inspirational Bahá'í



**Above:** Gary (back row, far left) enjoys giving kids and junior youth rides with his horse, Greta, around his farm during a 2017 Virtues Project camp in Ukraine.

**Left:** Gary and Svitlana visit Haifa, Israel, in February 2022—just before the Russian army invades Ukraine and the war begins.

**Q: How has Russia's invasion of Ukraine affected kids and families?**

**A:** It's a reality. Even on the farm, of the children that are here today, there are traumatized kids . . . Maybe they didn't get bombed, but they were in a situation where they could have been . . . Lots of families are being chased out of their cities . . . [But] the Ukrainian people did not give up and, I believe, will not give up . . . The people have gone through terrible . . . incidents to be able to recreate their life in a better way.

**Q: What virtues do we need to help the environment?**

**A:** A good virtue would be to observe around you and try to understand what you see and how it impacts the world and the environment. I think that's really important . . . Live a minimalistic lifestyle . . . [Bahá'u'lláh] talks about . . . [how] you don't need this excessive wealth. It's a virtue to say, "We don't need that."

**Q: What is "the Virtues Project" you're involved in?**

**A:** [In our] tiny village . . . I found this beautiful area with forests and fields and lakes to swim in . . . Friends in Kyiv . . . started sending their children . . . They found this place to be inspirational . . . It's not just a class, it's a small community where they live together. They play together, swim together, eat together. They clean their rooms . . . [and] even work in the fields . . . They help each other . . . [We] talk about what kinds of virtues you need . . . What kind of person you want to be, what kind of life you want to live . . . These fundamental principles of virtues . . . are essential and basic to all the religions of the world . . . The only thing we're going to be talking about that's a little bit different is how the world needs to change . . . We have to live as one, in unity, without war.

**Q: How is helping the environment a spiritual issue?**

**A:** In the world today, instead of being oriented on developing our capacities and our virtues and our quality of living . . . people want to buy more and more expensive things, material things. Let's look at life in a different [way] . . . we do not need to have so many things to be able to live a spiritual life. If we focus all our time and energy on developing the material life, we may not be having enough energy to be able to deal more with the spiritual realities, which is our purpose for living . . . Our reason for living is not to have more material things . . . There are other things that are much easier and much more important, and might even make you a much happier and more spiritually developed person.