


2022

### Best Practices in Protestant Aid for Ukrainian Refugees: 2022

Mark R. Elliott

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree>

 Part of the [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#), and the [Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Elliott, Mark R. (2022) "Best Practices in Protestant Aid for Ukrainian Refugees: 2022," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 42 : Iss. 7 , Article 5.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55221/2693-2148.2378>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol42/iss7/5>

This Article, Exploration, or Report is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact [arolf@georgefox.edu](mailto:arolf@georgefox.edu).

# **BEST PRACTICES IN PROTESTANT AID FOR UKRAINIAN REFUGEES: 2022**

**By Mark R. Elliott**

Mark R. Elliott, Ph.D., University of Kentucky, 1974, is a retired professor of European and Russian history. He edited the *East-West Church and Ministry Report* for 25 years (1993-2017) and now serves as editor emeritus. Since March 2022 he has published articles on Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine in *OPREE* (No. 2, March), *Religion Unplugged* (March 29 and April 5), *Providence* (April 11), and *Ukraina Moderna* (June 15).

## **In Harm's Way**

The Russian war on Ukraine took the life of an adult daughter of Gennadi Makhnenko, orphanage director and pastor of the Pentecostal Church of Good Changes in Mariupol. Vika, the 27<sup>th</sup> of 35 orphans adopted by Pastor Gennadi and his wife, fell victim to a Russian tank shell that destroyed her apartment on March 13, 2022. In anguished lament her distraught father addressed Putin mockingly, asking him if this was his “demilitarization and denazification.” “And your tanks naturally ‘save’ us and our children. Inhumane. Heaven will present you with a bill.... Forgive me, daughter, that I could not protect you. I really tried.”<sup>1</sup>

More fortunate, relatively speaking, is eleven-year-old Hasan, who somehow managed to escape the Russian invasion and make his way alone from Zaporozhe in eastern Ukraine to his siblings in Bratislava, Slovakia, a distance over 1,000 miles. Less than a week before Vika's death in Mariupol, Hasan crossed into Slovakia “with school bag on his shoulders and a plastic bag in hand.” As reported by Bratislava resident Milan Cicel, longtime staff member of the evangelical Navigator ministry,

Hasan was sent by his Ukrainian mother to safety because she could not leave her bed-ridden mother. His case is dramatic also because he and his siblings are actually refugees from Aleppo, Syria, to Ukraine where his father died. What is encouraging is that whole Europe is energized and mobilized to help. Even otherwise divided political parties unite on agenda to help Ukraine.... What EU nations could not achieve themselves, Putin made reality with his aggressive military politics. There is a hope. The Lord is smiling.<sup>2</sup>

## **The Dimensions of the Refugee Displacement**

---

<sup>1</sup> Cyrel Tujanlangitmar, “Russian Tank Shoots Pastor's Daughter in Ukraine,” *Christianity Daily*, March 25, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Milan Cecil to author, March 11, 2022.

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine came on the heels of eight years of conflict, including Moscow's 2014 seizure of Crimea and its support for pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Up to 2022 Russia was already responsible for the death of some 14,300 Ukrainians and the displacement of 1.5 to 2 million additional civilians.<sup>3</sup>

The present 2022 war has already dwarfed the number of uprooted lives of the slow-burn Russian aggression of 2014-21. In the first week of the February 2022 Russian invasion, the United Nations estimates some one million Ukrainians fled their homes, 547,000 to Poland alone, with many volunteers rushing to the border to offer humanitarian assistance.<sup>4</sup> By August 24, 2022, as many as 6.9 million Ukrainian refugees were scattered across Europe with an additional 6.6 million displaced within Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> According to the UN, nearly one-third of all Ukrainians have had to flee their homes, forming "the largest human displacement crisis in the world today"<sup>6</sup> and the largest war-induced European population movement since World War II. Underscoring the dramatic demographic dimensions of the present war, the uprooting of some 13.5 million Ukrainians in six months equals 45% of World War II's total displaced persons (30 million) over seven years (1939-45), not to mention the additional victims of Yugoslavia's disintegration in the 1990s.<sup>7</sup>

The largest number of Ukrainian refugees in Europe to date have come from the city and region of Kyiv (17 percent), Odesa (12 percent), Kharkiv (10 percent), Dnepropetrovsk (9 percent), and Donetsk (6 percent).<sup>8</sup> As for country of destination, Moscow's forces deported between .9 and 2.8 million Ukrainians to Russia against their will.<sup>9</sup> Apart from Ukrainians deported to Russia, the

<sup>3</sup> Oleh Wolowyna, "Ukrainian Refugees in 2014 and 2022: An Analysis and Proposed Solution," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, March 19, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Emily Rauhala, Julia Ledur, and Quentin Aries, "Where Have Ukrainian Refugees Gone?" *Washington Post*, June 27, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Ukraine Situation Report," August 24, 2022; <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-situation-report-24-aug-2022-enukru>.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Lives on Hold: Profiles and Intentions of Refugees from Czech Republic, Hungary, Republic of Moldova, Poland, Romania & Slovakia*, July 2022; [data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94176](https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94176).

<sup>7</sup> Mark R. Elliott, *Pawns of Yalta: Soviet Refugees and America's Role in Their Repatriation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 7; UN OCHA, "Ukraine Situation Report," August 24, 2022; Paul Mojzes, *Yugoslavian Inferno: Ethnoreligious Warfare in the Balkans* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> UNHCR, *Lives on Hold*.

<sup>9</sup> Antony J. Blinken, "Russia's 'Filtration' Operations, Forced Disappearances, and Mass Deportations of Ukrainian Citizens." Press Statement, July 13, 2022; <https://www.state.gov/russias-filtration-operations-forced-disappearances-and-mass-deportations-of-ukrainian-citizens/#:~:text=Estimates%20from%20a%20variety%20of,regions%20in%20the%20Far%20East;LoriHinnant,CaraAnna,VasilisaStepanenko,andSarahElDeeb,TheMouthofaBear:UkrainianRefugeesSenttoRussia,Associated>

present total of 6.9 Ukrainian refugees outside their homeland would be much higher but for the 3,793,403 refugees who to date have chosen to return to Ukraine.<sup>10</sup> The largest number of Ukrainians now residing in friendly states are in Poland (1,221,596), Germany (893,000), and the Czech Republic (391,856). Additional nations hosting 80,000 or more Ukrainian refugees are: Turkey (145,000); Italy (144,838); Spain (127,750); France (92,156); Bulgaria (87,510); Moldova (84,562); Romania (84,393); and Slovakia (81,370).<sup>11</sup>

Countries hosting the largest number of Ukrainian refugees per capita (number of native residents per Ukrainian refugee) are the Czech Republic (26.8), Estonia (28.9), Poland (32.6), Moldova (38.7), Lithuania (46.6), Latvia (53.3), Montenegro (66.8), Slovakia (69.4), Bulgaria (77.5), Germany (93.4), Austria (120), and Ireland (123.5). The generosity of two nations in particular deserves note: Poland—hosting the largest number of Ukrainian refugees, and Moldova, one of the poorest countries in Europe—hosting the fourth largest number of Ukrainian refugees per capita.<sup>12</sup>

Because of the Kyiv government's prohibition against men of fighting age (18 to 60) leaving the country, the vast majority of Ukrainian refugees abroad are women and children (90 percent), separated from one or more immediate family members (82 percent). A surprising 77 percent of displaced adults have completed technical or university degrees, while most are housed in private homes and apartments or rented accommodations (72 percent), as opposed to reception and transit centers and refugee camps.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Dimensions of Humanitarian Relief**

The dimensions of humanitarian relief efforts in 2022 on behalf of Ukrainian refugees almost beggar description. In the wake of the Russian invasion of February 24 the displacement of some 13.5 million civilians in a matter of months called forth the equivalent of a civilian army

---

*Press*, July 19, 2022; <https://apnews.com/article/31880d51ae29818b6c3b04156aae38d5>; TASS, "TASS Reported that 2.8 Million People Came to Russia from Ukraine after the Start of the War. Zelensky Said They Were Forcibly Taken Out," *Meduza*, July 24, 2022; Human Rights Watch, "We Had No Choice;" "Filtration" and the Crime of Forcibly Transferring Ukrainian Civilians to Russia, September 2022; <https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/09/01/we-had-no-choice/filtration-and-crime-forcibly-transferring-ukrainian-civilians>.

<sup>10</sup> "Ukraine Situation Flash Update," #22 (22 July 2022); <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-situation-flash-update-ww-ww-july-2022>

<sup>11</sup> UNHCR, *Lives on Hold*. Figures reflect totals through July 4-19, 2022, except for Turkey with its most recent report dated May 19, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> UNHCR, *Lives on Hold*; [www.worldpopulationreview.com/countries](http://www.worldpopulationreview.com/countries).

<sup>13</sup> UNHCR, *Lives on Hold*.

to render aid to the homeless. Included among the long list of providers of assistance are agencies of the United Nations and the European Union and a host of governments, foundations, relief and development NGOs, churches, Christian ministries, and untold numbers of concerned individuals acting on their own. The present study focuses upon just one element of this tide of humanitarian outreach: the work of Protestant churches and ministries. Unquestionably, the laudable refugee relief work of Catholics (especially in western Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, and Slovakia) and of Orthodox (especially in Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, and Bulgaria), deserves comprehensive treatment. But practically speaking such projects arguably would best be effected by authors with firsthand connections with Catholic and Orthodox churches and charities.

### **Assessing Best Practices in Ukrainian Relief Based on Survey Findings**

The plight facing today's Ukrainian refugees and attendant Western relief efforts on their behalf bring to mind a similar humanitarian crisis in Eastern Europe in the 1990s. The outpouring of Western relief efforts in this earlier instance occurred on behalf of 1) economically vulnerable East Europeans freed from Soviet domination and 2) impoverished citizens of the Soviet Union following its demise in 1991. Many in the West responded with commendable charitable initiatives to relieve the suffering and want that followed in the train of the political upheavals of 1989-1991. Unfortunately, mistakes sometimes accompanied assistance such as cross-cultural miscues, overpromising and underperforming, and an unhelpful "West knows best" attitude.

In the present Ukrainian refugee relief effort, one may observe a repetition of much effective aid—and instances of regrettable missteps. In the interest of affirming best practices and discouraging ill-advised actions, in the summer of 2022 the present author surveyed front-line Ukraine refugee relief workers, aid administrators, and aid recipients, recognizing that they have much to offer in the way of hard-earned sage advice. As a prompt to help generate responses, a document, "Best Practices in Humanitarian Relief," was attached to the survey cover letter consisting of excerpts this author compiled from articles on post-1989 relief work written by veterans of this earlier humanitarian effort.<sup>14</sup> The four survey questions were:

1. Can you give examples from your own experience that correspond with—or run counter to—advice given in the attached excerpts?
2. Can you share from your own experience—or from your observation of the experience of others—mistakes made in relief efforts?

---

<sup>14</sup> These articles were published in the *East-West Church and Ministry Report*; [www.eastwestreport.org](http://www.eastwestreport.org).

3. Have you observed examples of “lone rangers” in the need of greater accountability?
4. Have you observed instances of misrepresentation or misappropriation, and conversely, instances of extraordinary, selfless compassion? Can you give examples of either or both?

The present study is based on survey responses along with relevant published sources.

### **Keeping Promises**

“Many years ago,” writes United Methodist mission administrator Mel Munchinsky, “I personally decided it is best not to promise anything unless the chance of it being carried out was very high.” Quoting advice from the “Best Practices in Humanitarian Relief” attachment, Czech-American Munchinsky added, “‘An unexpected gift is always better than a broken promise’—this is right on! At the present time I know that very few UM congregations and individuals are promising anything,” even as they are delivering a great deal compared to their small size.<sup>15</sup>

At one point in March 2022 Nazarene bi-vocational pastor and builder Sergiy Dzyba was sheltering 17 refugees in his home in a suburb of Kyiv. Like Munchinsky, he writes, “Don’t make promises. It’s very dangerous during the time of crisis. We can put hope in people’s hearts and if we won’t be able to accomplish what we have promised to them we will create more bitterness, disappointment, hopelessness.”<sup>16</sup>

Great Commission Europe church planter Misha Dubovyk writes in the same vein from Rivne in western Ukraine: “In my practice, there were times when Western guests, under the influence of emotions, made promises, and then did not fulfill them.”<sup>17</sup> Retired Seattle Pacific University professor and longtime East European relief project facilitator Richard Scheuerman is also concerned that the West “must not over promise,”<sup>18</sup> while Greater Europe Mission leader Greg Nichols, with decades of service in Odesa and Prague, puts it bluntly, “Don’t make promises.”<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, in the current Ukrainian refugee crisis, aid workers must plan and coordinate relief assistance with recipient agencies and individuals, including forewarning of the size of pending deliveries. But the point is to never make a commitment that does not have a very high prospect of timely fulfillment.

---

<sup>15</sup> Miroslav (Mel) Munchinsky to author, July 25, 2022.

<sup>16</sup> Sergiy Dzyba to author, July 23, 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Misha Dubovyk to author, July 15, 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Scheuerman to author, June 19, 2022.

<sup>19</sup> Greg Nichols to author, July 29, 2022.

## Overcoming Ethnocentrism

Sometimes aid promises have come more quickly than accurate appreciation of the need. Speaking thoughtfully to this point is Oleg Turlac, an ethnic Russian from Moldova who is director of Turlac Mission based in Toronto:

From what I observed, Westerners did learn some lessons from the 1990s, and there was less of a missional paternalism/imperialism than I saw in the 1990s-early 2000s. There was more of a sense of partnership. Yet, some Ukrainians felt that again they became recipients of Western aid, and there was a feeling that the fate and future of Ukraine depended on the Western military and economic assistance. Therefore, Westerners, especially those that offered significant monetary help, were still treated as “Big Brother.” They still occupied pulpits when they visited Ukrainian diaspora churches in Europe. On some occasions, it appeared that some Western proclaimers had ready answers for the Ukraine situation, which they didn’t hesitate to offer from the pulpit. But this was balanced when other Western preachers offered words of compassion and empathy. In my experience, whenever Westerners said “some nonsense” from the platform, Ukrainians in the audience were willing to forgive and forget, mindful of how much Americans/Westerners were doing to help Ukraine militarily and economically. They would smile graciously and listen patiently.<sup>20</sup>

Many survey respondents recounted the over-eagerness of some aid workers who gave ill-informed remedies for problems they encountered. But not always. Randy Troyer of Samaritan’s Purse observes:

Personally, I did not see any evidence of Americans in this specific relief effort thinking that they knew the solutions better than the nationals did. On the contrary, most often I witnessed Americans genuinely wanting to know about the Ukrainian experience since the Russian invasion and not pushing their personal beliefs on any of the locals.<sup>21</sup>

A willingness and humility to listen can work wonders. John Bernbaum, former president of the Russian-American Christian University, advises, “Learn to listen—develop this discipline—especially when attempting to meet the needs of the most vulnerable.”<sup>22</sup> Romania-based World Venture missionary Randy Hacker notes, “We did try to listen to suggestions from our aid partners in Ukraine.... For a couple of churches, we stopped sending food and began sending funds because they thought they could purchase food in their area far cheaper than we could.”<sup>23</sup> Mike Watkins, a missionary for 17 years in Ukraine and Poland with Every Nation, makes the same point: “Our

---

<sup>20</sup> Oleg Turlac to author, July 21, 2022.

<sup>21</sup> Randy Troyer to author, August 2, 2022.

<sup>22</sup> John Bernbaum to author, “Relief to Redevelopment in Ukraine: What Lessons Have We Learned?” June 13, 2022.

<sup>23</sup> Randy Hacker to author, July 30, 2022.

Ukrainian and Polish teams organized local logistics with a priority for local purchases...based on needs determined by local leaders.”<sup>24</sup> As Estonian theological educator Toivo Pilli puts it, “We need to listen to real people or organizations that are in touch with people who are addressees [Ukrainian recipients] of the help.”<sup>25</sup> Misha Dubovyk from Rivne, Ukraine, explains succinctly: “Westerners can also learn from us. This process, by God’s design, is mutual.”<sup>26</sup>

Listening to and learning from Ukrainians is not only a means of overcoming Western ethnocentrism; it also is a recipe for more effective delivery of vital humanitarian aid. In addition, listening to learn from the other can reduce the temptation to inflate one’s contribution. “Never exaggerate one’s accomplishments. Give no concern for who receives credit for God’s work well done.” Such is the valuable lesson many a missionary learned from the example of Peter Deyneka, Jr., former president of Slavic Gospel Association, predecessor to today’s Mission Eurasia.<sup>27</sup>

Listening to learn from another is especially hard to practice from a position of material advantage, partly because those enjoying a superior economic position too often assume they somehow, therefore, possess superior judgement. Long-serving mission administrator Mel Munchinsky speaks to this handicap of affluence:

Americans are blessed with many resources which others can’t even imagine! This is both a blessing as well as a curse! Often, we think many challenges or problems can be solved by simply providing funding or other resources and, no doubt, in many cases, this has been beneficial. However, there are also issues raised that Americans often don’t think about when it comes to humanitarian aid.<sup>28</sup>

Over a decade ago missionary to Romania Andrew LaBreche, serving with Greater Europe Mission, analyzed the dynamics of the “West knows best” mentality, both how to account for it and how to overcome it:

Americans place high value on planning, efficiency, productivity, and profit. In fact, from an American perspective, reality is brimming with problems to be solved. The American emphasis upon tasks to be accomplished inevitably leads to a focus on techniques, on how to do things. However, ...in many traditional societies, life revolves around relationships [that]...take precedence over plans and structures. [In the Romanian context] people generally give priority to cultivating relationships over completing tasks. Hospitality to

---

<sup>24</sup> Mike Watkins to author, June 27, 2022.

<sup>25</sup> Toivo Pilli to author, July 21, 2022.

<sup>26</sup> Misha Dubovyk to author, July 15, 2022.

<sup>27</sup> Mark R. Elliott, “Lessons for Ministry from the Life and Example of Peter Deyneka, Jr., *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 9 (Winter, 2001), 6.

<sup>28</sup> Mel Munchinsky to author, July 25, 2022.



strangers and generosity are thus highly valued because they directly relate to the emphasis upon relationships.<sup>29</sup>

A Ukrainian might justifiably observe that parsing social dynamics of different cultures in peacetime may be well and good and constructive, but in the crisis and trauma of the Russian invasion, what use is it? Speaking in very pragmatic terms, Western relief workers and agencies know that accounting for the successful delivery of humanitarian aid to a given locale depends upon trust. And in Ukraine and in Eastern Europe bordering Ukraine, trust depends heavily upon relationships. Twenty years ago, I argued that “in post-Soviet-societies—except in some Westernized, urban settings—relationships are more important than schedules or the completion of tasks. Relationships are everything.”<sup>30</sup> In the face of Russia’s all-out invasion of Ukraine, which has generated many millions of refugees in a matter of months, the pressing necessity of the provision of emergency relief as quickly as possible does not permit the luxury of developing trust through time-consuming relationship building. As a consequence, the distribution of aid is greatly facilitated by existing networks of churches, Christian ministries, and NGOs that already possess trusting relationships developed across multiple state borders over decades.

### **Giving Appropriate Aid**

Despite many months of Russian troop buildup along the Ukrainian border, the actual invasion in late February 2022 still came as a shock. In response, accounts abound of churches, even very small ones, immediately stepping up to succor Ukrainian civilians fleeing for their lives. Spontaneous refugee relief (food, shelter, and transportation provided by volunteers) is all in full flower in the following representative vignettes of churches in Ukraine, Romania, and Poland opening their doors to the stranger.

Oleksandr Geychenko, president of Odesa Theological Seminary, writes:  
Many Christians volunteer to drive people from war zones to safer places or to distribute food and water among those who have need. They also dig trenches and guard their neighborhoods as members of territorial defense units. Churches open their basements for those who do not have places to hide or shelter people for a night or two on their way to the west of the country or abroad. The local church where my family and I are staying is

---

<sup>29</sup> Andrew LaBrecht, “American and Romanian Values at Odds,” *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 19 (Winter 2011), 14.

<sup>30</sup> Mark R. Elliott, “Guidelines for Guest Preaching, Teaching, and Cross-Cultural Communication,” *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 10 (Spring, 2002), 8-12.

hosting over 60 people from different corners of our country. Their stories tear the heart apart.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, seminary professor of sociology and Christian ethics Dr. Valeria Chornobai from Dnipro, Ukraine, writes:

Our church now looks more like a combination of hostel and warehouse (as, I believe, many other churches also look). This is my everyday routine now: We receive trucks with humanitarian aid in the church building, make individual food parcels, and have them distributed to the people hiding in the basements in Kharkiv. On the second floor of our church, refugees from war zones are staying. Often, those refugees come to our church having literally nothing but their very lives. They have lost everything. They have no spare clothes or shoes, no bags, no phones; their houses are totally demolished. So we give them food, water, a bed to sleep in. We buy them clothes and shoes and phones so that they can contact their family members.<sup>32</sup>

Equally active in relief work is a Romanian church described by Word Made Flesh missionary David Chronic:

Let me tell you about the church I have been most connected with in Galati, Romania, Emmanuel Christian Church.... When the war began in Ukraine, they put down mattresses and received 60-100 refugees per day. It was a very organic, grass-roots response. They opened up the church before the Romanian government had organized any sort of response. They hired coach buses to take the refugees west, opening up room to receive others the following day. They also set up a prefabricated shipping container to receive donations and sent a semi-truck of aid into Ukraine every week or so (though they said it was difficult to find drivers). Now, there are about 20 Ukrainians staying long-term at the church because they do not have anywhere to go. Along with providing beds, showers, and 3 meals a day, the church also mobilized volunteers to provide activities for the children. The worship songs are now all subtitled on the projector screens in Ukrainian or Russian and the sermons are translated on personal headsets. During the first month, volunteers from all across Europe came to help, and translation was provided in Spanish and English as well. While most Romanians do not speak Ukrainian or Russian, Moldovans do. The Moldovans in our church have proved to be extremely helpful. The church also received 3 full-time volunteers from the U.S. for a few months—two of whom speak Russian fluently. In July, the church ran a week-long day camp for over 50 Ukrainian children. They are preparing to open an after-school program for Ukrainians in the fall.<sup>33</sup>

Kevin Wepler, a missionary with Greater Europe Mission, also serving in Romania, shares a similar story:

---

<sup>31</sup> Oleksandr Geychenko, "Roundtable: Ukrainian Men's Voices," *Insights Journal* 7 (No. 2, March 2022); <https://insightsjournal.org/roundtable-ukrainian-mens-voices/>.

<sup>32</sup> Valeriya Chornobai, "Roundtable: Ukrainian Women's Voices," *Insights Journal* 7 (No. 2, March 2022); <https://insightsjournal.org/roundtable-ukrainian-womens-voices>.

<sup>33</sup> David Chronic to author, August 4, 2022.

At the church in Craiova the refugees are registered with the local police and then asked where they want to go on to. Most want to go to Germany with some to Italy. Many want to stay in Romania. Currently the church in Craiova has 8 houses where about 45 refugees are staying. One house is a transition house where they can stay short term and then move on. All accommodation, food, and transportation costs are donated from supporters in the U.S. and Canada.... A Ukrainian translator speaks Russian and English and with the aid of Google Translate they can understand each other. It takes many volunteers to take care of all the aspects of this ministry. Many short-term teams and individuals and a few long term have come on board from the U.S. and Canada to be involved in this.<sup>34</sup>

*Christianity Today* reporter Sophia Lee recounts the comparable outreach of a Polish congregation 120 miles north of Lviv, Ukraine:

Chelm Baptist Church was the first in its area to open a refugee shelter. The first day, 20 people showed up. The second, 120. On the third day and every day for weeks after, 200 people came. At first, the 80-member congregation was apprehensive. They were already struggling to pay the church bills. How could they handle hundreds of refugees?

“So we took a leap of faith,” Pastor [Henryk] Skrzypkowski said. He used his credit card to purchase new mattresses. The little church served 350 hot meals a day through the help of local restaurants and neighbors. Thanks to donations, the church sent five trucks to Ukraine packed with food and supplies worth \$40,000 per truckload. The church’s regular annual budget is \$50,000. “God completely changed us,” said...the church’s pastor Henryk. “We woke up from our comfortable life. Now we truly understand what it means to be the body of Christ.”<sup>35</sup>

Traveling through Poland, reporter Lee found the same generosity in church after church: “Many [Protestant] churches in Poland have small congregations; some can barely afford a full-time minister. God’s Light Church in Lublin, for example, has only 30 members, mostly college students and fresh graduates. When I visited, they were housing about 60 refugees a night in four different locations.” The congregation of Pastor Czeslaw Kusmider in Przemyśl, Poland, is now home to 40 Ukrainian refugees per night: “The church has always preached, ‘Love God, love people.’ Now God is saying, ‘I want to check the love that you say you have for me and people.’ We’re not just saying it anymore—we’re doing it.”<sup>36</sup>

## **Coping with Trauma**

---

<sup>34</sup> Kevin Wepler to author, June 24, 2022.

<sup>35</sup> Sophia Lee, “They Fled Ukraine, and Ukraine Followed; Escaping Russian Missiles, Some Exiled Believers Found a New Sense of Purpose Helping Refugees,” *Christianity Today*, June 21, 2022.

<sup>36</sup> Lee. “They Fled Ukraine.”

Along with food, shelter, and help with transportation away from danger, appropriate aid for Ukrainian refugees includes help in coping with the shock of war. The experience of theological educator and pastor Fyodor Raychynets, upon returning to Kyiv's northern suburbs after the Russian retreat, was visceral and wrenching:

What I saw and heard stuck in my veins.... I want to escape somewhere and just be silent or scream madly alone.... There's some dumb unspeakable pain stuck in my chest.... The scale of destruction, especially when you knew the lives of these towns before this inferno war, is just catastrophic.... Who is able, willing to listen to this pain, not just listen but hear.... What kind of psychology, and what theology are able to explain, understand, help? Yesterday, for the first time in 40 days of the war, I was scared, not from the missiles flying over my head, not from the explosions of bombs somewhere nearby, but scary for what we still have to hear, learn and how to live with it? God give us the strength to survive all this...and remain human.<sup>37</sup>

Realis ministry director Sergiy Tymchenko, like Fyodor Raychynets, was taken aback upon his return to Kyiv's outskirts after the Russian retreat:

Recently...we visited Vorzel, Borodyanka, and Irpen. Only now, almost two weeks later, I can write about what I saw and experienced. It was especially tragic to learn that Anya, a young girl from Vorzel church, was killed together with her mother in March. She was only 13 years old. I knew Anya quite well as I often picked her and her grandmother up to drive them to church.... Anya enjoyed reciting Christian poetry and Bible passages as early as kindergarten, and often showcased this passion during worship services. She was also a very talented artist. A Russian tank shot a car that carried Anya, her mother, and two other women when they were all trying to escape Bucha.<sup>38</sup>

With Russian forces threatening Kyiv, doctoral student Sylvia Cortez evacuated to Poland with her husband who is head of the Nazarene denomination in Ukraine. Researching the Ukrainian traumas of the 1930s Soviet forced famine, the 1986 Chernobyl, disaster, and the 2013-14 Maidan Revolution, she writes,

Never did I imagine that I would be a part of those ongoing traumatic events.... I believe God is present with us and is for us. I don't know how to completely reconcile that with all of the violence, terror, and genocide we are witnessing.... During the Holocaust, this prayer was scrolled on the wall of a concentration camp:

"I believe in the sun, even when it is not shining.

I believe in love, even when feeling it not.

I believe in God, even when God is silent."

I know that many are currently struggling in their faith at such horrors. They wonder why God is silent.... Is God uninterested? But I don't believe that God has been silent. I think

---

<sup>37</sup> Fyodor Raychynets to author, April 4, 2022.

<sup>38</sup> Sergiy Tymchenko to friends and partners, April 25, 2022.

God is listening and responding somehow to the millions of prayers. I believe that there have been miracles. I believe God has been speaking and acting and comforting and changing the trajectory of evil men and women through the people of God.<sup>39</sup>

Also burdened in spirit is Tanya Gerasymchuk, an Odesa Theological Seminary staff member:

I speak from the perspective of an ordinary woman. I am the mother of two daughters.... When the war began, I felt as though the infrastructure of my life had been ruined: You are uprooted; you start to live in a place where you don't belong. No matter how many good and kind people you meet on your way or how comfortable your conditions are at the moment, a feeling of detachment seems to prevail. It gets its hold on you and never leaves you. Another feeling that I and many other Ukrainian women possess now is uncertainty about the future. It is next to impossible to make long-term or even middle-term plans.... Separated families are another negative reality that confronts millions of people because husbands and adult sons have to stay in the country while their wives and children are in safer places. And nobody knows how long these families will be separated.<sup>40</sup>

The war has left many with “physical sensations of falling apart: insomnia or, inversely, persistent sleepiness. Continuous nightmares one’s mind is unable to shake off horrible images. Every one of us is kneeling prayerfully.” So reports Vice-Rector Maryna Ashykmyna of Tavriskii Christian Institute, who is also a psychologist with PTSD training.<sup>41</sup> Ukrainian-American psychiatrist Dr. Jurij Savyckyj relates that even before the Russian aggression of 2022, many Ukrainians were dealing with

deep-seated feelings of powerlessness and despair, stemming from years of insecurity.... We must remind ourselves that these people have lost 20 million family members within the past three generations in a different kind of holocaust. In [U.S.] terms, this would be the loss of 60 million Americans.<sup>42</sup>

Little wonder, then, that Ukraine’s health ministry believes that one-third of the country’s population will require mental health counseling.<sup>43</sup>

Moldovan-born ministry leader Oleg Turlac provides a pastoral perspective: What was lacking (from my experiences of visits to Prague and Warsaw) was the

---

<sup>39</sup> Sylvia Cortez to author, March 12, 2022.

<sup>40</sup> Tanya Gerasymchuk, “Roundtable: Ukrainian Women’s Voices,” *Insights Journal* 7 (No. 2, March 2022); <https://insightsjournal.org/roundtable-ukrainian-womens-voices>.

<sup>41</sup> Jayson Casper, “The Hardship Is Plentiful But the Workers Aren’t Few: Evangelicals Unite on Ukraine,” *Christianity Today*, August 5, 2022; <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/august/ukraine-refugees-europe-evangelicals-unity-wea-trust.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Yale Richmond, *From Da to Yes: Understanding the East Europeans* (Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press, 1995), 278.

<sup>43</sup> Casper, “The Hardship Is Plentiful.”

aspect of spiritual counseling. The refugees needed more than just food and shelter. They needed a listening ear—that required time, which pastors and other workers had in short supply. The refugees were dealing with various traumas: loss of home, death of loved ones and friends, and uncertainty about the future. Some refugees couldn’t talk. They just wept. Some were so traumatized that they spoke as if they were in Berdyansk or Mariupol. They couldn’t accept the new reality.

Many Ukrainian women and children escaped to Poland, leaving their husbands behind to fight the invading army. At times there was no one to listen to them and just be there. I don’t think pastors should be blamed for this. They did what they could. They simply could not address the overwhelming influx of emotional and spiritual trauma. What could have helped and is still needed is teams of experienced pastors/counselors who speak Russian and Ukrainian who could provide counseling to the refugees and help them cope with war trauma. Sadly, very few people with such skills could leave their jobs/ministries and come to Poland, the Czech Republic, or Slovakia for a long time.<sup>44</sup>

Even if insufficient, some efforts are underway to care for wounded spirits. Estonian Pastor Meego Rimmel is counseling Ukrainian refugees.<sup>45</sup> On a larger scale, Mission Eurasia provided trauma care for 20,000 Ukrainian youth in its summer 2022 camping program. And another ministry, Save Ukraine, has so far enlisted 12 psychologists who have provided counseling for 32,000 Ukrainians.<sup>46</sup> Seminary professor of sociology and Christian ethics Valeria Chornobai has done much to assist homeless Ukrainians. But at one point she realized that, in addition,

I need to be with the refugees. Some refugees have lost their friends or family members. They’ve seen death. When they come to us, they are often unable to speak. They are devastated, shocked, grieved, when you see them, you understand that you need to sit with them in silence, cry with them, hug them...I want to be the good Samaritan who just helped someone in need.<sup>47</sup>

### **Avoiding Inappropriate Aid—and Other Miscues**

As much as such caring for refugees commends itself, not all, sad to say, is done well, **is** well intentioned, and is above board. Though painful to relate, the fact is that miscues, inappropriate aid, and even some rare cases of outright fraud dot the Ukrainian relief landscape. Ukrainian-American theologian Alexander Negrov, with relatives in Russian-occupied territories, has observed that “Some of the western cities [of Ukraine] are overloaded with help, while eastern

---

<sup>44</sup> Oleg Turlac to author, July 21, 2022.

<sup>45</sup> Toivo Pilli to author, July 21, 2022.

<sup>46</sup> Casper, “The Hardship Is Plentiful.”

<sup>47</sup> Chornobai, “Roundtable.”

cities and villages often do not get much help.”<sup>48</sup> But this may be interpreted as a logistical rather than ethical shortcoming. Not so the account of missionary to Poland Randy Hacker:

There was one company here that housed refugees in its warehouse, and as a result was donated a semi-truck load of material from England. They couldn’t use it, so offered to sell pallet loads of aid. After debating through the moral implications, we did decide to purchase 25 pallets of aid. Some of the things were very helpful, but in hindsight I think this was a mistake.

Hacker also recalled some types of relief aid that were “not really needed, and worse, the “misuse of donated materials.” “We avoided working with 2 large organizations that seemed to be connected with this misuse.... Those of us who will still be here after they leave will have to clean up after them.”<sup>49</sup>

Estonian theologian Toivo Pilli observes that “misuse or missteps often emerge from great enthusiasm, but little willingness for cooperation or little attention to information about actual needs.”<sup>50</sup> In reference to free-lance, culturally clueless volunteers, Randy Hacker admitted, “I did meet some lone rangers, but the need was so great then, that I tried to help them and bless them. In days of overwhelming crisis, even the lone rangers were helpful.”<sup>51</sup> Actually heartening is the candor that survey respondent Randy Troyer of Samaritan’s Purse expressed in describing a misplaced emphasis that was later corrected.

One of the largest mistakes my organization made was the underestimation of the Ukrainian healthcare system. Initially, nearly all of our humanitarian efforts were focused on medical needs because we assumed there would be massive casualties on the front lines, and most of the healthcare workers would have fled west across the country to escape. What we found out after several weeks/months is that though there were millions of Ukrainians that fled, a huge number still stayed behind and manned hospitals and clinics. The medical facilities we set up weren’t seeing nearly the number of patients nor the degree of injury we were expecting. After months of the conflict, it became apparent that food security was going to be the main issue that aid organizations would be able to solve, so we pivoted our resources more towards food distributions and well drilling.<sup>52</sup>

Retired Seattle Pacific University Professor Richard Scheuerman, however, recounts one “benefactor” beyond the pale in his deceptive approach to Polish authorities:

---

<sup>48</sup> Alexander Negrov to author, June 7, 2022.

<sup>49</sup> Randy Hacker to author, July 30, 2022.

<sup>50</sup> Toivo Pilli to author, July 21, 2022.

<sup>51</sup> Randy Hacker to author, June 7, 2022.

<sup>52</sup> Randy Troyer to author, August 2, 2022.

I am aware of far-right American pastor-politician Matt Shea of Spokane Valley [Washington] who traveled to Poland as part of a controversial initiative to care for some sixty Ukrainian orphans.... Government officials in Poland were initially receptive to Shea's offer to aid refugees from Ukraine but grew suspicious over news he had plans to relocate orphans to the U.S. The case represents an example of Westerners who can sometimes operate relatively unhindered abroad and exploit chaotic situations to serve their own purposes instead of the needs of those they purport to help.<sup>53</sup>

It is important to note that President Zelenskyy has postponed the adoption abroad of Ukrainian orphans for the duration of the war because of the difficulty at present of determining for certain which children are clearly orphaned.<sup>54</sup>

Notwithstanding cases of unworthy individuals and agencies guilty of muddle-headedness, ethnocentrism, arrogance, cross-cultural cluelessness, and even fraud, many more have acted charitably toward suffering Ukrainian refugees. It is fitting to close this section on appropriate and inappropriate aid with several more uplifting accounts. Brent and Colleen Weaver are Kyiv-based church planters with One Mission Society (OMS). Now in the West, Brent in March 2022 unexpectedly found himself fulfilling a new calling working with the flood of Ukrainians crossing the border into Hungary, helping provide food, transportation, and accommodations. Colleen writes, "There are daily stories of miraculous provision.... [Brent's] trips to the border are long days spent in the van and waiting at border crossings." Fellow OMS team member Pavlo in Lviv, Ukraine, helped open two refugee shelters "where we can host about 50-60 people per night...[and] provide food, medicine, and all basic necessities." Experiencing both the dark days and the hope of God in those first weeks of the war, Colleen opened up to her friends and supporters:

Grief comes in unexpected moments every day as we think about people we love, wonder how they are, pray and cry out to God. Like the psalmist we look to God to reveal his plans for this situation and personally for us. Together with so many from Ukraine, we are now without a home and looking to God, our Rock and hope, to give us a song in the night. God is our salvation.<sup>55</sup>

Then there is the story of the selflessness of an elderly Polish woman, poor in material possessions but wealthy in spirit. Misha Dubovyk from Rivne relates:

Hundreds of thousands of ordinary inhabitants of Poland opened their homes to refugees from Ukraine. My two sisters: Liya and Natalya with their children, who were fleeing from

---

<sup>53</sup> Richard Scheuerman to author, June 19, 2022.

<sup>54</sup> Associated Press, "Adoptions Another Facet of Life Halted by War in Ukraine," May 21, 2022.

<sup>55</sup> Colleen Weaver to friends, March 15, 2022.



Kharkiv, spent about 20 hours in line at the border. It was the last two days of February. They remember the huge queues of Ukrainians from different cities of Ukraine who were simply saving their lives. After crossing the border, they were welcomed by hundreds of Poles who prepared warm clothes, a variety of food and water, medicines, and various basic necessities. Strangers met the refugees with great compassion and tried to help them in every possible way. It was extremely moving. Mrs. Irena took in Liya and Natalya with their children. This woman welcomed them in her two-room apartment. Seventy-year-old Irena gave the best room to the refugees. She bought products and everything that was necessary. Her friends came and brought various help. The Evangelical Church showed great love and support for them. My sisters and their children lived in Mrs. Irena's house for three months. This is a testimony of God's extraordinary work in the hearts of thousands of people in Poland and all over the world. I know that this is a great service, because we still have refugees living in our house. For two and a half months, 7 people from the Donetsk region lived in our house.<sup>56</sup>

Finally, Randy Troyer of Samaritan's Purse relates a moving account of help for a young amputee:

One of the pastors that we worked with in a small village outside of Vinnytsia, Ukraine, had a daughter who had to have her leg amputated when she was a child. Prosthetic legs are very expensive, and being a pastor of a very small church, he and his wife did not have the money to buy several different-sized legs as the girl got older and bigger. And because of the conflict, they had to order expensive ones from western Europe which they could not afford. As a result, the girl was having to hobble around on crutches with her stump showing, and she was very ashamed and embarrassed of it.... The workers at the base I was at decided to get together some money (several thousand Euros) to give the pastor so he could buy the prosthetics for his daughter. When we gave him the money, he broke down crying and said he would never forget the generosity.

Those receiving assistance sometimes are able to show their appreciation in a tangible way. In a lighter vein, Troyer recalls, "There were several instances eating out in town where local Ukrainians would come up and thank us for our help and pay for our meals (which of course we tried to refuse but when a large hairy Ukrainian man name Slava wants to pay for your meal, you let him)."<sup>57</sup>

### **Understanding Actual Need**

A critical requirement for appropriate Western humanitarian aid is obtaining an understanding of specific needs directly from Ukrainians, rather than assuming "the West knows best." It is a function of listening, as already urged by Oleg Turlac, John Bernbaum, Randy Hacker,

---

<sup>56</sup> Misha Dubovyk to author, July 15, 2022.

<sup>57</sup> Randy Troyer to author, August 2, 2022.

and Toivo Pilli. Another joining this chorus is Prague missionary Greg Nichols: “I don’t know any Westerner who can go in [to Ukraine] and negotiate to bring in humanitarian supplies.... Where I am we have Ukrainians who are living outside their country trying to get aid back into their country.”<sup>58</sup> Hungarian Christian business woman Krisztina Oláh sees it the same way: “I visit the border once monthly (when I visit my parents there), and I keep in touch with the local mayor, two Ukrainian families who live and work in Hungary now, with the foreign organizations (mainly from Italy), and individual volunteers (from the UK, Israel, and India) as well. They keep me updated about the needs there.”<sup>59</sup>

Every Nation missionary administrator Mike Watkins illustrates what he considers a misguided and a contrasting common-sense approach to determining needs and rendering aid:

Several US-based entities wanted to send medical supplies and medical professionals to work in the field. Upon further investigation, these people had little or no experience in such endeavors but had a lot of financial resources they wanted to use. However, consulting Ukrainian doctors I knew made it clear that the western proposals were not feasible. We instead asked Ukrainian doctors and field medics their needs, and these resources were either purchased locally or shipped in from Europe or the U.S.

More generally, Watkins shares, “Our Ukrainian and Polish teams organized local logistics with a priority for local purchases while the supplies lasted. All purchases were based on needs determined by local leaders.”<sup>60</sup>

There is a place, of course, for humanitarian aid in kind, especially to the extent it can overcome the dangerous logistics of delivery farther east into Ukraine close to the fighting fronts, as Ukrainian-American theological educator Alexander Negrov and Prague missionary Greg Nichols note.<sup>61</sup> Still, to best help Ukrainian refugees, Anita Deyneka, with many decades of experience in leadership of Slavic Gospel Association, Mission Eurasia, and most recently, A Family for Every Orphan, puts it plainly: “I think Ukrainian Christians most need funds.”<sup>62</sup> Methodist mission administrator Munchinsky gives a concrete example of how such funding can work to best effect:

It is important that networks and partners be consulted as to what is really needed. In the case of the Russian/Ukrainian war what is often needed are financial resources rather than the shipment of goods. Natives are often able to buy things locally and thus contribute to

---

<sup>58</sup> Greg Nichols to author, July 29, 2022.

<sup>59</sup> Krisztina Oláh to author, June 14, 2022.

<sup>60</sup> Mike Watkins to author, June 27, 2022.

<sup>61</sup> Alexander Negrov to author, June 7, 2022; Greg Nichols to author, July 29, 2022.

<sup>62</sup> Anita Deyneka to author, August 9, 2022.

their local economy. Of course, closer to the war front, availability is limited.... In order to help with this situation, financial resources work best. For example, in Uzhgorod [Ukraine] our churches are taking care of about 200 persons each day. It costs \$7 per person to provide for the basics such as food, a bed, etc. This quickly adds up, but local relief workers are able to provide these items if financial resources are available.<sup>63</sup>

A telling account of funds to the rescue comes from Sergiy Tymchenko, president of Kyiv-based Realis, a Christian counselor training program. With the prospect of a Russian invasion looming, Tymchenko requested funds from friends in the West to speed up the completion and winterizing of a dormitory in the suburb of Vorzel where Realis staff might retreat in case of war. Sharing with donors, Tymchenko wrote:

Many of you sponsored the building of Realis' dormitory in Vorzel, a town near Irpin and Bucha.... You also helped make it ready for refugees during the war. As a result, the dorm was supplied with beds, a generator, and a potbelly stove. After Russian soldiers occupied Vorzel, they looted and destroyed the belongings of many local people, including those who lived in four houses around Realis. However, the Russians didn't enter our dormitory. They saw the outer brick walls without plaster and they looked through the windows of an unfinished room on the first floor. They figured that the building was empty and there was nothing of value inside, so they left. During the occupation, many local people suffered for more than a month from cold, hunger, and lack of water because the town's power station was destroyed. After the Russian army abandoned Kyiv's suburbs, Realis humanitarian help has been one of the major sources of food and water for local people. For the past two weeks, [mid-April 2022] Realis' stove heated up food for them and Realis' generator pumped water from the well to the water tower supplying the town with water. Thank you for your partnership. It makes a difference!<sup>64</sup>

## Evaluating Volunteers

Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Anne Appelbaum highlights in an August 2022 *Atlantic* article the extraordinary volunteerism of Ukrainian civilians of all walks of life intent upon the survival of their homeland against Russian aggression. An exceptional heroine of this "Other Ukrainian Army" is Anna Bondarenko, head of Odesa-based Ukrainian Volunteer Service (UVS). As a high school exchange student in the U.S., she was exposed to the phenomenon of grassroots community service which she took to heart: "She volunteered at her host family's local church, at a national park, at an animal shelter. She remembers entering a contest, trying to accumulate 150 hours of community service in order to get a certificate signed by Barack Obama. (Hers, alas, was signed by someone else.)" Back home, Anna helped recruit a legion of *volonteri* including

---

<sup>63</sup> Mel Munchinsky to author, July 25, 2022.

<sup>64</sup> Sergiy Tymchenko to friends and partners, April 25, 2022.

“students, accountants, hairdressers, and every other conceivable profession” anxious to see Ukraine survive and thrive, free from Russian domination. A Ukrainian Google search, “I want to volunteer,” brings up UVS as the top entry. Little wonder then that since February 24, UVS has connected over 100,000 Ukrainian “accountants, drivers, medics—with more than 900 organizations” determined to thwart Russia’s efforts to destroy their country.<sup>65</sup>

As with Ukrainian non-church-related civil society, so with support for Ukraine from Christian believers, both within Ukraine and from the West. “How can I help?” Since February 24, millions of people in the West have answered this question by donating to Ukrainian refugee war relief, and thousands more have volunteered to help. It is striking in the wake of the Russian invasion that not only governments, businesses, foundations, NGOs, relief and development agencies, churches, and mission organizations, but even legions of individuals have stepped forward to assist Ukrainian refugees who have been forced from their homes.

All the previously described accounts of Ukrainian, Romanian, and Polish church relief for refugees has been dependent upon congregational volunteers. Local parishioners stepping forward to help is no surprise for believers who take the gospel seriously. But in the present crisis reports are mixed regarding volunteers new to Eastern Europe; some are deemed problematic, while others are considered a godsend. Missionary to Poland Randy Hacker speaks to the downside:

Early in the war, as many Westerners contacted me to come help, I just told them to please not come. I was overwhelmed, and probably not very nice about it, but the few that came just got in the way. My standard answer was: “Do you speak Polish, Ukrainian, or Russian? Have you ever been to this part of the world? If no, please don’t come—at least not to us.” Some of the people who came were able to help at the border handing out food and water, and a few were able to help in some aid organization warehouses, but for the most part they weren’t able to do things that they expected to do. It would have been far more helpful if they had sent the money for their trip to churches here in Poland that were assisting refugees or sending aid.<sup>66</sup>

Methodist mission administrator Munchinsky also asks the tough, but necessary, questions of would-be volunteers:

Shortly after the war started, I received calls from people who wanted to do volunteer work in Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and other places. They were willing to pay their way and wanted to connect with a UM church in one of these countries. I asked the question, “Are you willing to accept instruction and direction from a native?”

---

<sup>65</sup> Anne Appelbaum, “The Other Ukrainian Army,” *The Atlantic*, August 10, 2022.

<sup>66</sup> Randy Hacker to author, July 30, 2022.

How are you going to communicate since many people may not speak English? Would an interpreter have to be assigned to you thus taking away a person from helping with other forms of relief? Are you willing to eat, sleep, and work in very difficult circumstances?” These and other questions were asked. Their response was often, “I didn’t think of those issues”... I don’t know of any that followed through on their intentions after I raised these challenges.... I have no doubt their hearts and motives were in the right place, but they had failed to think through the implications of what lay ahead of them.<sup>67</sup>

With cautions almost identical to those of Hacker and Munchinsky, Every Nation missionary Mike Watkins puts practical questions to those from the West wanting to help in person: “What do you want to do? What are your skills (medical or language)? What critical resources can you bring in that we cannot find locally? Are you willing to work with and under local leadership?”<sup>68</sup>

As for Westerners eager to share a witness with Ukrainian refugees, Munchinsky views them as well-intentioned but cross-culturally challenged:

I’ve had individuals who want to travel to Ukraine to do evangelism and build up churches. I’ve had to explain to them that under the circumstances, this would be very difficult and that relief is what is required at the present time. As far as evangelism is concerned, local Ukrainian congregations, and in neighboring countries are doing this! They not only share basic needs of food and shelter but also the gospel.<sup>69</sup>

Bi-vocational Nazarene Pastor Sergiy Dzyba voiced an identical concern in caring for his homeland’s refugees:

I use...opportunity to preach the Gospel to needy people not via words but first meet their physical needs and then feed them spiritually. Many people in my country did this mistake many times, to try to feed people first spiritually and then physically. It’s created some resistance in people’s minds when they hear words *church* or *Christianity*. Therefore, we need to be very careful when we’re ministering to the people.<sup>70</sup>

As noted, a recurring theme raised by those with concerns about prospective volunteers centers on relevant language skills; those lacking them are often viewed as a burden, while those with them are frequently welcomed. For example, Every Nation’s Mike Watkins writes, “One positive Western proposal deserves mention. Several young adults who were missionary kids in Ukraine—my daughter’s classmates—had become certified medics or nurses in the U.S. and had

---

<sup>67</sup> Mel Munchinsky to author, July 25, 2022.

<sup>68</sup> Mike Watkins to author, June 27, 2022.

<sup>69</sup> Mel Munchinsky to author, July 25, 2022.

<sup>70</sup> Sergiy Dzyba to author, July 23, 2022.

the language skills and medical skills to volunteer alongside Ukrainian medical professionals on the field.”<sup>71</sup>

Budapest’s Krisztina Oláh regularly travels to Zahony, Hungary, close to the border with Ukraine, to help war refugees. There she met a remarkably gifted volunteer, a medical student from India who has what it takes to help:

He’s been in Zahony at the train station since the end of February. He speaks Russian, Ukrainian, English, and he helps refugees. He started as a volunteer and after 2 months unpaid service he was employed, and now he has a salary for his work! He has no free night or free weekend: he just spends all his time at the station. That is his home now. I try to convince him to take some days off and visit me in Budapest. Just to show him around and to put him in a “relaxing” mode. But he keeps saying: “I am needed here. And I stay as long as I am needed.” He will receive his medical-surgeon degree at the end of August! He plans to return to India later. He is a nice, kind, dedicated person.<sup>72</sup>

### **Avoiding Burnout**

This Indian medical student volunteering nearly nonstop would have done well to take a few days’ break in Budapest because mental fatigue and burnout are very real concerns for relief personnel. Cindy LeClair with Mission Eurasia observes, “They’re all overwhelmed,” and one worker in particular she knows “is very close to the edge emotionally right now.”<sup>73</sup> Rafal Piekarski of Proem Ministries in Poland likewise reports, “People are on the edge of exhaustion.”<sup>74</sup> Moldovan Oleg Turlac shares at length on this problem:

I noticed the fatigue of pastors and Christian workers addressing the needs of Ukrainian refugees. While all the aid was directed toward helping the refugees and various causes inside Ukraine, very few paid attention that pastors and other workers were on the verge of burnout. There were just too many Ukrainians coming into Warsaw every day by train, bus, etc. Phone calls from all over the world poured into Poland and Czech Republic with requests to “help my relatives/friends/coworkers fleeing the war.” There were way too many requests to handle.<sup>75</sup>

Short of an unlikely large influx of additional trained relief staff, what else can be done to lighten the load? Turlac writes,

---

<sup>71</sup> Mike Watkins to author, June 27, 2022.

<sup>72</sup> Krisztina Oláh to Paulette Jordan, copied to author, July 26, 2022.

<sup>73</sup> Cindy LeClair to author, July 22 and July 6, 2022.

<sup>74</sup> Casper, “The Hardship Is Plentiful.” See also proemministries.org.

<sup>75</sup> Oleg Turlac to author, July 21, 2022.

Wherever I was, I tried to take care of some of the needs of pastors and other workers. Even a 30-minute coffee break away from the refugee center was of great help. On one occasion, I discovered that while a Ukrainian diaspora pastor cared for dozens of refugees daily, his family was in great need and struggled to make ends meet. So, we helped the family move to an apartment that was adequate for their needs.<sup>76</sup>

Ukrainian bi-vocational Pastor Sergiy Dzyba advises, “Don’t try to help everybody. There is temptation to help everyone, especially when people cry out for help. I had to learn to prioritize the needs of people. I have to be focused on what I have and what I can do.”<sup>77</sup> As well, the task—even though pressing—should not trump relationships. Missionary Pastor Randy Hacker in Romania, referring to the *East-West Church and Ministry Report* document on post-1989 relief recommendations, responded:

That was a helpful document that helped me see a mistake that I was making—and I felt I should have known better. When drivers came to our [humanitarian aid] warehouse, I was usually very busy, and frequently did not take the time for a conversation. After reading the document, I tried to change that, to at least talk for a bit about what they were doing with the aid, and to pray with them.<sup>78</sup>

### **Making the Most of Partnerships**

A noteworthy feature of the current Ukrainian refugee relief effort is the frequency with which diverse parties cooperate. Partnerships abound within and across borders, between individual churches, between denominations, between churches and parachurch NGOs and mission agencies, and even in some instances between often contentious Christian confessions and between faith communities and secular relief agencies and governments.

In Poland in June 2022 *Christianity Today* reporter Sophia Lee observed the concrete benefit for Ukrainian refugees that comes when even small Protestant denominations make the most of their institutional ties across town and across borders:

Though most churches lack the resources of government bodies, denominations, like a railroad network, were able to act instantly, evolving their services swiftly and effectively without being encumbered by government bureaucracy. In many towns, churches were the first responders. They retrieved refugees from the border; fed, clothed, and housed them; helped enroll kids in school; connected them with churches in other cities.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> Oleg Turlac to author, July 21, 2022.

<sup>77</sup> Sergiy Dzyba to author, July 23, 2022.

<sup>78</sup> Randy Hacker to author, July 30, 2022.

<sup>79</sup> Lee, “They Fled Ukraine.”

A key word here is *connected*. “Ties that bind hearts in Christian love” simultaneously have spiritual and practical dimensions. Longstanding, trusting relationships among disparate denominations have facilitated rapid-response help for displaced Ukrainians. One illustration is Crates for Ukraine, a ministry of Mission to the World, the global arm of the Presbyterian Church in America. Local PCA churches in the U.S. gather requested humanitarian aid (basic care; basic meds; and basic wound care) and recruit church volunteers who personally deliver supplies as their checked bags on flights to Krakow, Poland. From there other volunteers deliver the humanitarian aid across the Ukrainian border to waiting Reformed churches for distribution where most needed.<sup>80</sup> Again, church-to-church denominational ties work because of long-established trust and a ready-made network for delivery.

As another example, Romania’s Speranta Baptist Church in Draganesti partners with six Baptist churches working together in the capital under the banner of Ukraine Bucharest Churches ’22 (UBC ‘22), sheltering refugees in homes and churches, feeding them, and helping many on their way farther west.<sup>81</sup> Another Baptist-related ministry, World Venture (originally Association of Baptists for World Evangelism), has the advantage of missionaries who have served for years in both Ukraine and Poland. They are “working together with Polish and Ukrainian churches and Christians,” writes World Venture theological educator John White, a veteran of two Russian-induced traumatic evacuations, one from Donetsk Christian University in 2014 and a second from Kyiv’s Ukrainian Evangelical Theological Seminary in 2022.<sup>82</sup> Looking at the bigger picture, fellow theological educator Toivo Pilli shares, “Our church [in Estonia] has cooperated with the European Baptist Federation: they have information, they are in touch with local churches, and they have channels how to help the addressees.”<sup>83</sup>

Underscoring the value of longstanding Baptist fellowship across borders is the cross-cultural sensitivity of missionary pastor Randy Hacker:

My wife and I have been in Lublin, Poland, for 23 years, where I pastor a Baptist church. Lublin is 85 km from a major border crossing—Dorohusk.... Lublin is also a major university town, with many students from Ukraine. What this means is that for many years we have had at least a few Ukrainians in our church, and since 2014 our church grew to be about half Ukrainian. When Russia invaded in February, we were inundated with refugees, many of whom were somehow connected to people in our church.... We had already

---

<sup>80</sup> Ron Kyzer to author, July 22, 2022; <https://www.cratesforukraine.com>.

<sup>81</sup> Kevin Wepler to author, June 24, 2022.

<sup>82</sup> John White to author, July 6, 2022.

<sup>83</sup> Toivo Pilli to author, July 21, 2022.



worked for years to integrate Ukrainians, Poles, and Belarussians in a faith community, and much of what we did [to help Ukrainian refugees] was an outgrowth of that church culture.

Our Sunday School immediately switched to Russian from Polish led by Belarussian students, and at that time we had many children from eastern Ukraine as refugees. Then we switched again to Ukrainian, after some of the eastern children moved West. Until February, everything we did was in Polish because even the Ukrainians and Belarussians in our church wanted to practice learning Polish. When our church went from 45 to 100+ on February 27, we began translating everything into Ukrainian as well. Then as many refugees moved on, and those who were going to stay settled into life here in Lublin, (attendance about 80), we switched to only translating the sermons into Ukrainian, again to help refugees staying more permanently to learn Polish.<sup>84</sup>

The same beneficial denominational dynamic has been at work in a Ukrainian Pentecostal diaspora church in Warsaw, one of 17 churches planted by Pastor Oleksandr Demianenko. Journalist Sophia Lee reports on his Warsaw congregation. It:

received so many donations from locals and other churches in Europe that boxes and crates spilled out of their rented church space. Before he had shipped a single truckload to Ukraine...Demianenko knew he'd need to rent an actual warehouse. That warehouse is now a bustling hub for Ukrainians from all over the world. Refugees, missionaries, ministry leaders, and volunteers from Ukraine, North America, Estonia, the Netherlands, Spain—a once-scattered diaspora congregates in this Warsaw building through a common identity, faith, and mission.

The church quickly developed a streamlined system for their warehouse. They built a coordination team. They kept a fast-moving waitlist of requests from church leaders for supplies and evacuation. They calculated the cost of each truck full of supplies and slashed costs by ordering products directly from factories. They also mobilized a network of churches from Europe to North America to send donations and supplies to the warehouse, provide transportation for evacuation, or offer shelters for refugees. Most days, Demianenko marches about the warehouse from morning till midnight meeting with church leaders and coordinating each day's route for the delivery trucks.

"I've never seen anything like this before," he said. "Before, everyone was fighting for bread for himself. Now, everyone is fighting to give bread." This, he declared, is "extraordinary and supernatural. This is God." He grinned wide. "And it's only beginning. We will be different after this. We will change"—he tapped his heart—"here."

Summing up this illustration of denominational cooperation, Demianenko shared, "We were ready because we were already so well connected."<sup>85</sup>

In the case of the United Methodist Church, since the breakup of the Soviet Union surviving Soviet-era Methodist congregations in Estonia have been augmented by new church plants in

---

<sup>84</sup> Randy Hacker to author, July 30, 2022.

<sup>85</sup> Lee, "They Fled Ukraine."

Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Central Asia. According to mission administrator Munchinsky:

Today...relationships and partnership have been built up over the last 30 years and so a network exists to provide aid. Furthermore, Ukrainian partners are able to let us know what is needed, we don't have to guess.... UMC networks have been quickly established in Ukraine itself as well as UM churches in neighboring countries receiving displaced persons. The results are that churches have utilized space to their limits and resources have been provided not only from the United States but also from Methodist churches throughout Europe. We don't have to build networks from the ground up in this case, which is a good thing, and so, response times are quicker.<sup>86</sup>

In addition to fruitful denominational affiliations, instances of refugee relief involving interdenominational and church-parachurch cooperation easily run into the hundreds, if not thousands. Mission Eurasia, headed by Ukrainian-American Sergey Rakhuba, is a prime example of effective parachurch-church collaboration in aid of Ukrainian refugees. Perhaps the largest East European ministry, with many decades of experience dating back to the 1930s, Mission Eurasia's current coordination with churches in Ukraine, Poland, Romania, and Moldova as of August 10, 2022, has involved the printing for distribution of 1,454,089 Ukrainian and Russian Scriptures and Scripture portions and 1,402 tons of food, including 112,367 family food packages. With the help of 2,727 volunteers, Mission Eurasia has also assisted 151,896 refugees in help centers and has evacuated 22,282 Ukrainians fleeing Russian shelling.<sup>87</sup>

In the early stages of the conflict, Russian forces destroyed Mission Eurasia's headquarters in the Kyiv suburb of Irpen and all Scriptures stored there. It remains a mystery why Russian soldiers would burn Russian-language Bibles, some of which were the Synodal Version approved by the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>88</sup>

Samaritan's Purse is another ministry that has relied heavily upon its ties to local churches in Ukraine. Randy Troyer underscores this relationship:

My organization focused mainly on food/supply distributions and medical services. We relied heavily on already established local connections predominantly with church leaders and pastors. We use these connections to let the community know when and where food distributions would be, as well as where our mobile medical units would be stationed.

---

<sup>86</sup> Mel Munchinsky to author, July 25, 2022.

<sup>87</sup> Sergey Rakhuba to author, August 20, 2022; Mission Eurasia, "Fact Sheet on the War in Ukraine and Mission Eurasia's Response," August 10, 2022.

<sup>88</sup> Michael Ray Smith, "May God Make a Miracle": Millions Flee Ukraine Praying for War's End," *Religion Unplugged*, April 6, 2022; <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2022/4/6/nbspmay-god-make-a-miracle-millions-flee-ukraine-praying-for-wars-end>; Sergey Rakhuba to author, September 6, 2022; Den Gorenkov to author, 9/8/22.

Without these partners the reach to the local populace would be drastically shallower, and the number of beneficiaries would be significantly lower.<sup>89</sup>

World Venture missionary Randy Hacker, himself the author in 2021 of *A Study in "Partnership:" North American Mission Agencies in Poland*, relates the experience of his Baptist congregation in Poland:

We understood from the very beginning how important partnership is, and thankfully we already had those partnerships with churches in Western Ukraine before February.... For us in Lublin, the partnership with Fellowship International was most helpful. For about 2 months, we provided aid to 2 churches in Poland that they work with. Those churches then sent aid to Ukraine.

Hacker notes that, in addition, World Venture partners with the Southern Baptist International Mission Board, International Messengers, Send, ReachGlobal, and E3 Partners: "The mission agencies that have been present here in Poland were glad to work together."<sup>90</sup> Like World Venture, Every Nation benefits from sister churches in Poland and Ukraine working together. Mike Watkins shares that an "advantage of our ministry is that Ukrainians and Poles now lead the missionary work I and others began in the early 1990s. This gave our organization a substantial footprint from which to start relief work in the region."<sup>91</sup>

Moldovan-born Oleg Turlac provides a firsthand observation of a multi-faceted church-parachurch collaboration for the benefit of displaced Ukrainians:

One of the most effective cooperation models I observed was in Warsaw. The Warsaw Bible Church, located in downtown Warsaw within two miles of the Central Train Station, is pastored by pastor Mykhailo [Balokha] who is originally from Western Ukraine. This Ukrainian/Russian/Belarusian church existed in Warsaw before the Russia/Ukraine war. It was a place of worship for the diaspora in Warsaw and Ukrainian seasonal workers. It was also a home away from home for the refugees from Belarus who ended up in Warsaw, escaping from the Lukashenko regime. The Warsaw Bible Church...nearly doubled in size since the beginning of the war. The worship language now is primarily Ukrainian, although pastor Mykhailo switches back and forth between Ukrainian and Russian. He has to do it because Belarusians are Russian speaking. Also, many Ukrainians from Donbas, Kherson, and Kharkiv are Russian speaking. Here is a positive example of cooperation I observed while in Warsaw in March 2022. It was that Westerners/Americans cooperated with Ukrainians from the Bible Church, who knew the needs inside Ukraine and maintained effective communication with pastors in Ukraine. This eliminated the language barrier and

---

<sup>89</sup> Randy Troyer to author, August 2, 2022.

<sup>90</sup> Randy Hacker to author, July 30, 2022. *A Study in "Partnership"* can be purchased from Amazon.

<sup>91</sup> Mike Watkins to author, June 27, 2022.

ensured that financial resources were used beneficially. Western visitors/missionary organizations would provide funding. Ukrainians took care of the rest (purchase and delivery). I saw Western missionary agencies partner with this church, which served as a hub for helping the refugees arriving from Ukraine en masse during the first two months of the war. It also served as a hub for sending aid provided by different organizations from the West to people/churches inside Ukraine. The church would buy food, medical and hygiene supplies, pay for the truck, and transport the goods to the needy in Ukraine. Ukrainians coming to Warsaw could come to a small warehouse/supplies center that the church managed and get whatever they needed. The congregation had an outreach ministry by the Ukrainian Embassy in Warsaw, which welcomed hundreds of people daily.<sup>92</sup>

The same cross-border phenomenon is at work in Romania. Kevin Weppler of Greater Europe Mission writes:

It is amazing to see the churches of different denominations in Romania and abroad partnering together. In Isaccea [Romania] we have Ukrainian NGO contacts from Odesa that we meet at the border. They come across into Romania with a 5-ton truck and we unload from [our] convoy of vans (4-7). This includes donated aid in the form of clothes, nonperishable food, and over-the-counter medicine. We do this van convoy once weekly or biweekly.<sup>93</sup>

Rivne-based Misha Dubovyk describes what he justifiably considers “an excellent example of cooperation and effective partnership between representatives of different groups, organizations, countries.”

On April 29, 2022, our social assistance center “Shlyah” from the city of Rivne (Western Ukraine) received the first truckload of food and essential items. This became possible thanks to cooperation with the Kyiv charity fund “Realis.” Long-standing Christian friendship and joint service in Ukraine over the past 20 years have become the key to successful cooperation. In turn, the head of the “Realis” foundation [Sergiy Tymchenko] had a long-standing friendship with Christians from Slovakia [Bratislava-based Integra Venture]. It was thanks to the Christians of Slovakia that humanitarian aid was purchased. At that moment we received three trucks and had the opportunity to send food aid to different regions of Ukraine. I know that funds for this aid were collected by Christians from various countries of the West. Without joint work, such an effect would be impossible. We Ukrainians did not have the funds to buy these products and things, and the Europeans and Americans did not have the opportunity to deliver them to the war zone for people who were starving.<sup>94</sup>

Similarly, the Ukrainian Relief Fund is an ambitious collaborative effort between Ukrainian Protestant seminaries and various Western ministries headed by Rivne-based Taras

---

<sup>92</sup> Oleg Turlac to author, July 21, 2022.

<sup>93</sup> Kevin Weppler to author, June 24, 2022

<sup>94</sup> Misha Dubovyk to author, July 15, 2022.

Dyatlik, Regional Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia for Overseas Council—United World Mission (Charlotte, North Carolina) in conjunction with ScholarLeaders International (Deerfield, Illinois).<sup>95</sup> Ten seminary hubs in Ukraine and one in Moldova “provide food, accommodation, evacuation, and spiritual help” to displaced Ukrainians, over 156,000 as of July 2022. According to Dyatlik, “If you would ask me where is theological education today in Ukraine? I would respond, it is still in the seminary, but temporarily in a hallway. In the classrooms we have people who need immediate care—material, social, psychological, and spiritual. Now we are doing theology through presence, not only teaching.” Working nonstop Dyatlik has helped partnering agencies, seminaries, and churches respond to a dire humanitarian crisis. U.S. donations have been used by staff at Ukrainian Relief Fund centers throughout the country to shelter, feed, and evacuate westward a steady stream of refugees who in most cases have lost everything. Underscoring the geographic scope of the enterprise, in July 2022 Dyatlik and OC-UWM Ukraine liaison Scott Cunningham traveled almost 2,600 miles visiting all 11 relief centers, at one point venturing as close as 20 miles to the front lines of opposing Ukrainian and Russian forces.<sup>96</sup>

An especially expansive network of cooperating churches and agencies assisting Ukrainian refugees comes under the auspices of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA). In April 2022 WEA launched The Response-Ukraine Special Taskforce (TRUST). It is headed by Ukrainian Ruslan Maliuta who has extensive previous experience with volunteer mobilization through his leadership of the Alliance for Ukraine Without Orphans. To date TRUST encompasses 20 evangelical denominations and church networks in Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova.<sup>97</sup> All told, March through June 2022, this collaboration involved over 64,100 staff and volunteers serving through 74 refugee help centers. Romanian pastor Chris Guess shares, “Having churches reach across denominational lines to work together has been one of the most encouraging things. We have volunteers from across the globe.”<sup>98</sup>

In May 2022, a meeting of 72 leaders from 22 European nations led to the formation of the Christian Ukrainian Collaboration (CUC). According to reporter Jayson Casper, “Initial cooperation between the networks was minimal, as CUC addressed the continental response while TRUST worked through channels in Ukraine and neighboring countries.” But with TRUST’s

---

<sup>95</sup> Evan Hunter to author, June 16, 2022.

<sup>96</sup> Scott Cunningham to author, August 19, 2022.

<sup>97</sup> Lee, “They Fled Ukraine;” Casper, “The Hardship Is Plentiful.”

<sup>98</sup> <https://worlddea.org/ukrainecrisis>; Casper, “The Hardship Is Plentiful.”

Ruslan Maliuta now added to the CUC leadership team there is the prospect “to strengthen coordination.”<sup>99</sup>

As regards inter-confessional cooperation in Ukrainian humanitarian assistance, it appears to be the exception to the rule—or perhaps too often hidden under a bushel. In any case, the admonition of educator John Bernbaum to volunteers should be taken to heart: “Leave your denominational affiliation at home and become ecumenical in terms of developing partnerships.”<sup>100</sup> One heartening—and at the same time heart-wrenching—example of cooperation across creedal divides comes from President Valentin Siniy of Tavriskii Evangelical Institute:

The [Protestant] pastor of one of the small churches in the suburbs of Kherson worked with a Catholic priest, an Orthodox priest, and the mayor of this town, and for 7 days they buried executed civilians. Some civilians were killed because they sat in their cars or for some other ridiculous reason. Sometimes they found corpses in ditches along the road.<sup>101</sup>

Perhaps in time more instances of such difficult but needed service across confessional lines will come to light. In the meantime, Gordon-Conwell Seminary theologian Don Fairbairn, himself a former missionary educator at Donetsk Christian University, seeks to counter triumphalist impulses in some Christian quarters, which work to the detriment of cooperative ventures of compassion:

One thing that all Christians must recognize is that our mission and witness are designed to foster the building of God’s kingdom, not the advance of one particular tradition or another. Yet far too often, we consciously or unconsciously assume that God is at work primarily (or even exclusively) through our tradition. Of course, theological differences dividing the different Christian traditions are significant, and we have every right to believe that God works in great ways through our tradition, fueled by our theology. But it is in no way true that he works *only* through one tradition or one Christian theology to the exclusion of others.<sup>102</sup>

It bears repeating that, notwithstanding this article’s description of myriad church, parachurch, denominational, and interdenominational Ukrainian refugee relief efforts in 2022, it still falls well short of the full scope of humanitarian aid extended by Christians. As noted, this article does not cover equally commendable, herculean efforts of Catholics and Orthodox to relieve

---

<sup>99</sup> Casper, “The Hardship Is Plentiful.”

<sup>100</sup> John Bernbaum to author, “Relief to Development,” June 13, 2022.

<sup>101</sup> Valentin Siniy, “Roundtable: Ukrainian Men’s Voices,” *Insights Journal* 7 (No. 2, March 2022); <https://insightsjournal.org/roundtable-ukrainian-mens-voices/>.

<sup>102</sup> Don Fairbairn, “Response to New Missionary Code of Conduct: The Benefit of Minority Christian Confessions,” *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 20 (Spring 2012), 4; <https://www.eastwestreport.org/43-english/e-20-2/341-responses-to-new-missionary-code-of-conduct>.

the suffering of displaced Ukrainians. These confessions deserve their own studies. Nor does it even do justice to Protestant church and parachurch outreach since it does not treat, for example, such major players as Lutherans, World Vision, and Cru (formerly Campus Crusade). In this sense, the present accounting is an interim report that is illustrative rather than comprehensive. The author's apologies, then, to the many deserving good Samaritans not named by name.

One form of cooperation—church and parachurch collaboration with secular bodies (governmental and inter-governmental agencies and non-church-related institutions and NGOs)—may more easily be documented once Russia's war on Ukraine is concluded. Pointing in this direction was a June 9, 2022, Kyiv conference co-sponsored by Lviv's Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU) and the prestigious Kyiv-Mohyla Academy: "Lessons of War and Rebuilding the Country and Society." Tellingly, conference participant and vice-rector of UCU Oleg Turiy emphasized, "One of the important messages we want to convey via this platform is that great things are accomplished together."<sup>103</sup> Once the war ends, emergency relief will give way to a greater focus on sustainable development and longer-term recovery. A study by the European Investment Bank four months into the war estimated the rebuilding in Ukraine could cost one trillion dollars, while discussion at the July 4-5 Ukraine Recovery Conference in Lugano, Switzerland, upped the estimate to "trillions," daunting sums by any measure.<sup>104</sup> Even these staggering figures are obviously an incomplete reckoning since at this writing Russian missiles and artillery shells are still raining destruction on Ukrainian cities daily.

### **Combatting Corruption; Promoting Accountability**

One dynamic that could undermine Western resolve to help underwrite costly postwar Ukrainian recovery would be a failure on the part of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's administration to successfully rein in deeply entrenched corruption. This corrosive force, which was pervasive in the Soviet Union, has only deepened its grip since 1991 in most post-Soviet states.<sup>105</sup> Over the past three decades, Ukraine has not been spared the depredations of avaricious

---

<sup>103</sup> Larissa Nycz Montecucullo, "These Are Tragic Yet Grace-Filled Times: Report on UCU's Activities during the Fourth Month of the War." June 30, 2022; <https://ucufoundation.org/these-are-tragic-yet-grace-filled-times-report-on-ucus-activities-during-the-fourth-month-of-the-war/>.

<sup>104</sup> Bloomberg.com, "Start Planning Reconstruction of Ukraine Now," June 7, 2022; BBC, "UkraineCast," July 6, 2022.

<sup>105</sup> Chilling accounts of the scope and pervasiveness of post-Soviet corruption include Karen Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015); Bill Browder, *Red Notice: A True Story of High Finance, Murder, and One Man's Fight for Justice* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015); and Bill Browder,

oligarchs and government officials on the take. In fact, the 2021 Corruption Perception Index of the accountability NGO Transparency International ranks Ukraine in lowly 122<sup>nd</sup> place worldwide, with scant consolation that a raft of other post-Soviet states fall even lower: Azerbaijan (128), Russia (136), Uzbekistan (140), Kyrgyzstan (144), Tajikistan (150), and Turkmenistan (169).<sup>106</sup>

A firsthand introduction to the formidable challenge that corruption poses for Ukraine and other post-Soviet states may be illustrated by the career of U.S. foreign service officer and three-time ambassador Marie Yovanovitch. She engaged in uphill combat against corruption in the majority of her postings: in Somalia, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Russia, and Ukraine. In fact, the defining motif of her distinguished—and tumultuous—diplomatic career was her struggle against public and private malfeasance. Her revealing and thought-provoking memoir, *Lessons from the Edge*,<sup>107</sup> is an almost unbroken litany of engagement abroad against bribery, extortion, kickbacks, under-the-table dealing, influence peddling, nepotism, and even profit-motivated violence and murder. Opponents she faced in her overseas assignments ranged from compromised and compromising lowly customs officials all the way up to judges, legislators, presidential administrations, and behind-the-scenes but no-less-powerful oligarchs. Conversely, Yovanovitch used her influence in every posting to promote best practices in governance including transparency and the development of robust civil societies as a check against profiteers in private and public life.

Given her well-deserved and widely recognized reputation for integrity both within and without the State Department, it is even more ironic and tragic that this warrior against wrongdoing would herself be forced to resign her final assignment as ambassador to Ukraine on the basis of false charges of corruption brought against her by politicians who themselves were corrupt. Wholly unsubstantiated calumnies against Ambassador Yovanovitch were fabricated by a cabal of bad actors in Ukraine, chief among whom was Prosecutor General Yuriy Lutsenko, and from the

---

*Freezing Order: A True Story of Money Laundering, Murder, and Surviving Vladimir Putin's Wrath* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2022).

<sup>106</sup> <https://transparency.org/en/cpi/2021>. For post-independence corruption see Serhii Plokhyy, *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 331-34 and 337-38.

<sup>107</sup> Marie L. Yovanovitch, *Lessons from the Edge* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2022). For the ongoing Ukraine anti-corruption campaign see Yana Dlugy, “Corruption in Ukraine; We Talk to Former U.S. Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch about the Challenges Ahead,” *New York Times*, July 1, 2022.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/01/briefing/Russia-ukraine-war-corruption-yovanovitch-odessa.html>; Associated Press, “Corruption Concerns Involving Ukraine Are Revived as the War with Russia Drags On,” July 20, 2022; Oleg Sukhov, “Parliament Appoints Anti-Corruption Crusader to Top Judicial Body Amid Botched Reform,” *Kyiv Independent*, August 15, 2022.



U.S., chief among whom was Rudy Giuliani, lawyer for President Donald Trump. This is not the place to treat the byzantine intrigue that forced the ambassador's departure from Kyiv under a politically manufactured cloud. Suffice it to note, in defense of her unblemished reputation, that on May 9, 2019, The National Defense University inducted Ambassador Yovanovitch into its Hall of Fame, and that same year Georgetown University appointed her diplomat in residence in its highly regarded Institute for the Study of Diplomacy.<sup>108</sup>

The kleptocratic post-Soviet world in which Ambassador Yovanovitch courageously contended is the same in which relief workers and relief recipients must now interact. Volodymyr Zelenskyy was elected Ukraine's president in 2019 on a campaign promise to wage war against corruption. Now that he must wage a hot war against a Russian invader, struggle against self-serving and self-enriching state officials and oligarchs has had to temporarily take second place to military defense.

In such a climate preventing misappropriation of Ukrainian relief aid has to be a major concern for donors. In peacetime in the West, pressure to compromise one's conscience is arguably easier to resist than in a wartime setting where corruption and bribery have been a way of life for ages.<sup>109</sup> Looking at the post-Soviet region as a whole, mission administrator Munchinsky reflects on the need to combat corruption:

Anyone who has traveled in Eurasia has probably had some experience with this. I know I have! One thing that stands out to me...is how different Eurasians understand corruption compared to Western partners. Please don't misunderstand me; I think combatting corruption is important, but each agency or individual has to consider what constitutes corruption and what is a very grey area where no clear answers are provided.<sup>110</sup>

Back in 2004-05, Sergey Rakhuba, future president of Mission Eurasia, was heavily involved in humanitarian assistance to survivors of the Muslim terrorist attack on a school in North Ossetia in southeastern European Russia that took the lives of 331 people:

While people and organizations from all over the world wanted to help in Beslan...there was no solid system in place to coordinate assistance. Unfortunately, this contributed to an unhealthy spirit of competition among Christian organizations and gave rise to scams among local residents. While visiting some victims' families in Beslan with a team of local

---

<sup>108</sup> Yovanovitch, *Lessons from the Edge*, 285. See also Catie Edmonson, "Top State Department Official Confirms Smear Campaign Against Ousted," *New York Times*, October 30, 2019.

<sup>109</sup> Helpful in thinking through the grey areas of ethics and accountability is *Missionaries and Bribes* by Ronald Koteskey, retired Asbury University professor of psychology. The full text may be downloaded at [www.missionarycare.com/missionaries-and-bribe.html](http://www.missionarycare.com/missionaries-and-bribe.html).

<sup>110</sup> Mel Munshinsky to author, July 25, 2022.

believers, I saw groups of women dressed in black dresses and scarves who did not resemble Beslan residents. They approached anyone who looked like a foreigner and demanded that they receive financial help for their “relatives” who supposedly had suffered from the attack.<sup>111</sup>

In 2022, a similar instance of “mistaken identity” as regards legitimate aid recipients appears to be the case in Ukraine. The overwhelming majority of Ukrainians vigorously oppose the Russian invasion and in impressive numbers volunteer for military service. Nevertheless, some able-bodied men not permitted to leave the country have been observed in western Ukraine hiding while availing themselves of humanitarian assistance.<sup>112</sup> While, as regards relief agencies, this could be viewed as a case of unintentionally inappropriate distribution of aid, it underscores the need for careful monitoring of assistance.

Mission administrator Munchinsky recounts another version of attempts to take advantage of would-be donors:

During this Russian/Ukrainian war, I’ve encountered a different twist on this issue. I’ve had Ukrainian requests for aid because, for example, a person had lost their job because of the war or a request for financial medical help because of injury. Because some individuals have had contact with local American congregations, they know how generous donors can be. Since I don’t know many of these individuals, I’ve had to refer them to local Ukrainian pastors or laity to investigate and then let me know the status of their request. To date, only one has been legitimate so far! This has been rather distressing; however, there are ways to get more information today.<sup>113</sup>

What then constitutes a genuine lack of accountability or misappropriation when dealing with enormous numbers of shell-shocked Ukrainian refugees who have lost everything to the Russian invasion? Not all cases of aid distribution are clearly black or white, that is, unambiguously appropriate or inappropriate. Consider the predicament of the overworked relief coordinator in Ukraine or Poland or Romania. He or she is overwhelmed with aid flowing in and out and is too exhausted to always take the time for receipts and other documentation. Or to alleviate an especially pressing need in one locale they might use funds or material that had been designated for a different village, city, institution, or church.

---

<sup>111</sup> Sergey Rakhuba, “Christian Aid in the Wake of Beslan Terrorism,” *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 14 (Summer 2006), 4-8.

<sup>112</sup> Greg Nichols to author, July 29, 2022.

<sup>113</sup> Mel Munchinsky to author, July 25, 2022.

Or as another example, under the exigencies of unpredictable wartime circumstances, a seminary rector might choose to buy food and mattresses for refugees housed on campus instead of purchasing texts and white boards for students who are now mostly evacuated anyway. Can one fault the use of a donation for refugee food and shelter that was intended for theological education when, because of the war, instruction has had to be suspended?<sup>114</sup>

While the fighting continues Mike Watkins of Every Nation considers it permissible to abbreviate accountability safeguards, but only with co-laborers whose integrity has been proven over decades.<sup>115</sup> Similarly, Scott Cunningham of Overseas Council—United World Mission relates that in the present wartime emergency, “We are not asking for receipts and beneficiaries, just by type—fuel, food, etc. Not normal accountable practices. It comes down to relationships.”<sup>116</sup>

To the extent possible, close monitoring of the distribution of funds and material still should be a priority even during a war, “not because donors suspect misuse of funds, but rather [because] audits protect all involved with the result that transparency produces greater trust.”<sup>117</sup> And for Western assistance to continue flowing in sufficient quantities trust is critical. As mission administrator Munchinsky relates,

With the large amounts of gifts of funds being sent for displaced person’s assistance or refugee work, accountability has been a top priority for many administrators, including myself.... Most of us have learned the lesson that in order to keep trust between partners, accountability is a key indicator. Today, accountability with our churches is still a learning process, but fortunately it’s becoming less of an issue. For example, our mission agency does audits at least once a year of local treasurers wherever funds are directed.... [which] fortunately protect everyone involved.

To be sure, Munchinsky understands that “best practices of accountability usually happen when administrators or others are able to visit and view what is going on.”<sup>118</sup> But that is not always possible as the fighting rages. Greg Nichols of Greater Europe Mission, writing from Prague, reflects on the present dilemma of providing funds to individuals instead of organized bodies (churches, seminaries, mission agencies, etc.): “We are sending money to an old friend who was a student of mine in Odesa. Even with him, I am not drilling down to find out exactly how he spends

---

<sup>114</sup> Author’s phone conversation with Scott Cunningham, July 5, 2022.

<sup>115</sup> Mike Watkins to author, July 27, 2022.

<sup>116</sup> Author’s phone conversation with Scott Cunningham, July 5, 2022.

<sup>117</sup> Mel Munchinsky to author, July 25, 2022.

<sup>118</sup> Mel Munchinsky to author, July 25, 2022.

the money...because he is there, and I am not. The difference now is that I cannot be there ever to check.”<sup>119</sup>

## Conclusion

Russia's all-out invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, dramatically accelerated Moscow's military campaign against its southwestern neighbor which had begun in 2014. This unprovoked invasion managed to generate an equally dramatic displacement of Ukrainian civilians, some 13.5 million and counting.

Paradoxically, the humanitarian response has been both phenomenal and inadequate. It has been phenomenal in its prodigious marshalling of resources and in its determination to alleviate enormous human suffering, calling forth impulses of generosity on a massive scale on the part of the UN, the EU, numerous individual European and North American governments, businesses, foundations, relief and development NGOs, churches, Christian ministries, and untold millions of individual good Samaritans within and without Ukraine. On the other hand, the humanitarian response has been inadequate primarily because so many millions were made homeless so quickly (in six months, such that even an unprecedented relief effort sometimes has fallen short).

Documenting the final dimensions of the Ukrainian refugee relief effort obviously is impossible as long as Russian aggression continues. Given the size of the refugee population once hostilities cease, a comprehensive accounting of the humanitarian response will still be an ambitious undertaking. In the interim, the present study has attempted to introduce the scope of the relief effort undertaken by Protestant Christians. The focus has been on illustrations of best practices to be emulated and various types of malpractice to be avoided.

Finally, one may observe both a disadvantage and an advantage that Protestants possess in coming to the aid of Ukrainian refugees compared to their Catholic and Orthodox sister confessions. The disadvantage is that Protestant individualism can generate lone rangers who, whether well-intentioned or not, lack the institutional accountability that is more regularly the case in the more elaborate episcopal hierarchies of the Catholic and Orthodox churches. Conversely, Protestantism has the advantage of followers who are able to act rapidly in an emergency, which is certainly what Ukrainian refugees have needed. With, on average, less clerical bureaucracy and less rigid chains of command, individual Protestants have been able to quickly exercise the gift of

---

<sup>119</sup> Greg Nichols to author, July 29, 2022.

compassion toward Ukrainians in need. The testimony of Krisztina Oláh of Gazdagrét Hungarian Reformed Church in Budapest is a prime example:

It may be an interesting fact that all the people involved in the refugee ministry have been called INDIVIDUALLY to this service. There was no time to organize ourselves (even though the church leadership tried to do it from the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of war), so people like me just started to do what they can at a personal level either in the Budapest railway stations, in refugee shelters, or directly on the border. By doing so, after a while, we got in touch with each other and started to exchange information, experiences, ideas, and even financial and product donations. I fully experienced the guidance by God: in my own acts and in the acts of my friends and congregation members. Maybe this is something special: We reacted at our own individual level and God connected us behind the scenes and multiplied our efforts. And this individual level worked the best on the other end as well when we helped refugees directly, one by one, for moms, for kids, for people without language skills, etc. They very much appreciated this personal touch. And this is again how God worked in us: we became His hands, feet, and personal voice.... This is how God cares about us. He provides information, enough financials, and product donations. And this is not a one-way help: by serving the ones in need, we learn a lot about the difficult situation people could get into.... We learn about our own weaknesses and strengths, about how lost we are and how God keeps us alive, saved, and loved.

And I am thankful that all the PEOPLE involved in this personal level of “service” are somehow connected to my church. Their individual efforts have been influenced by the spiritual support they continuously receive in our congregation. If I would make a list of those people, I could not name each of us, so many have participated in those efforts. Moms, fathers, single ladies, older ones, students, colleagues, and friends.<sup>120</sup>

Much-beloved Methodist missionary to India E. Stanley Jones, famous for his aphorisms, once summed up his yearning for Christian communion across denominational and confessional lines as follows: “Everybody who loves Jesus ought to love everybody who loves Jesus.”<sup>121</sup> This speaks to the benefit of the exceptional level of cooperation and partnership that obtained in Ukrainian refugee relief in 2022. If one were to expand on Jones’s aphorism one might admonish: “Everybody who loves Jesus ought to love everybody who Jesus loves.” This speaks to the frequently observed impulse among individuals and agencies assisting Ukraine in 2022 to provide assistance based solely on need rather than creed. May it always be the case.

---

<sup>120</sup> Krisztina Oláh to author, August 25, 2022.

<sup>121</sup> Author’s notes from an E. Stanley Jones Asbury College chapel message, April 26, 1969. For a similar sentiment, “Everyone who belongs to Christ belongs to everyone who belongs to Christ,” see E. Stanley Jones, *A Song of Ascents; A Spiritual Journey* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1979), 284.

## Ten Commandments for Ukrainian Refugee Relief Workers

By Mark Elliott

- I. **Keep promises.** *“Never make a commitment that does not have a very high prospect of timely fulfillment.”*
- II. **Overcome Ethnocentrism.** *“Those enjoying a superior economic position too often assume they somehow, therefore, possess superior judgement.”*
- III. **Learn to Listen.** *“Listening to and learning from Ukrainians...is a recipe for more effective delivery of vital humanitarian aid...and can reduce the temptation to inflate one’s contribution.”*
- IV. **Exercise humility and be willing to sacrifice.** *In Poland “Mrs. Irena took in Liya and Natalya with their children...in her two-room apartment. Seventy-year-old Irena gave the best room to the refugees.”*
- V. **Understand the depth of trauma refugees are experiencing.** *“Some refugees have lost their friends or family members. They’ve seen death.... They are often unable to speak. They are devastated, shocked, grieved. When you see them, you understand that you need to sit with them in silence, cry with them, hug them.”*
- VI. **Avoid burnout.** *“The Indian medical student [in Hungary] volunteering nearly nonstop would have done well to take a few days’ break in Budapest because mental fatigue and burnout are very real concerns for relief personnel.”*
- VII. **Be flexible and willing to accept directions.** *“Are you willing to eat, sleep, and work in very difficult circumstances? Are you willing to accept instruction and direction?”*
- VIII. **Give appropriate aid.** *Along with innumerable accounts of freely offered food, shelter, and transportation for Ukrainian refugees, some offerings were “not really needed.” Other “missteps...emerge from great enthusiasm, but little willingness for cooperation or little attention to information about actual needs.”*
- IX. **Make the most of partnerships.** *“A noteworthy feature of the current Ukrainian refugee relief effort is the frequency with which diverse parties cooperate...within and across borders, between individual churches, between denominations, [and] between churches and parachurch NGOs and mission agencies.”*
- X. **Be accountable.** *“To the extent possible, close monitoring of the distribution of funds and material...should be a priority even in the midst of war, ‘not because donors suspect misuse of funds, but rather [because] audits protect all involved with the result that transparency produces greater trust.’”*

### Email and Phone Communications with the Author

Bernbaum, John	Russian-American Christian University	6/13/22
Cecil, Milan	Navigators	3/11/22
Chronic, David	Word Made Flesh	8/4/22
Cortez, Sylvia	Church of the Nazarene	3/12/22
Cunningham, Scott	Overseas Council/United World Mission	7/5/22; 7/19/22
Deyneka, Anita	A Family for Every Orphan/Mission Eurasia	8/9/22
Dubovyk, Misha	Great Commission Europe	7/15/22
Dzyba, Sergiy	Church of the Nazarene	7/23/22
Gorenkov, Den	Mission Eurasia	9/8/22
Hacker, Randy	World Venture	7/30/22
Hunter, Evan	ScholarLeaders International	6/16/22
Kyzer, Ron	Mission to the World, Presbyterian Church in America	7/22/22
LeClair, Cindy	Christian Education Resource Network/ Mission Eurasia	6/22/22 & 7/6/22
Munchinsky, Miroslav (Mel)	In Mission Together, Global Ministries, United Methodist Church	7/25/22
Negrov, Alexander	Hodos Institute	6/7/22
Nichols, Greg	Greater Europe Mission	7/14 & 29/22
Oláh, Krisztina	Gazdagrét Hungarian Reformed Church	6/8 & 14/22; 8/25/22
Pilli, Toivo	International Baptist Theological Study Centre	7/21/22
Rakhuba, Sergey	Mission Eurasia	8/20/22; 9/6/22
Raychynets, Fyodor	Ukrainian Evangelical Theological Seminary/ Bethany Baptist Church	4/4/22
Scheuerman, Richard	Seattle Pacific University	6/19/22
Troyer, Randy	Samaritan's Purse	8/2/22
Turlac, Oleg	Turlac Mission	7/21/22
Tymchenko, Sergiy	Research Education and Light Center (Realis)	4/25 & 27/22; 5/18/22
Watkins, Mike	Every Nation	6/27/22
Weaver, Colleen	One Mission Society	3/15/22
Weppler, Kevin	Greater Europe Mission	6/24/22
White, John	Ukrainian Evangelical Theological Seminary/ World Venture	7/6/22