

Communication from Ukraine MB Conference Chair, March 17, 2022

Friends!

Historically, the Mennonite creed of life has been peacemaking and social service, and today is the time when we, as a large Mennonite family, can turn our calling into action. Despite all the horrors of the war, I am glad that most of the people from our churches are active servants of the community in this war. Someone accepts refugees at home; someone serves as their own business or transport. People share everything they have and let strangers into their homes, help the wounded, serve in hospitals and risk their lives to evacuate people from under the shelling. Many men serve in the military, providing them with counseling and prayer assistance. Some are coordinating processes and finding a way of interaction and areas where there is a need. All churches of all denominations are open to people who need shelter and food, and this is a huge testimony for non-believers. All prayer houses of Ukraine known to us have been turned into places for receiving and feeding people. These are challenging times, but they help us put theory into practice.



Now about the situation in the country. According to unofficial data, 40 thousand people are now considered killed or missing the conflict's start, including military casualties. More than three millions have fled. The defensive actions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine lead to heavy losses on the part of the armed forces of the aggressor country and have already led to a significant weakening of active assaults in many areas. The tensest situation is in those places where the Russian troops have already managed to gain a foothold, these are places in the north, south, and east of Ukraine.

Enemy troops deliberately forbid entry and exit to the occupied cities and villages, including for food trucks; their goal is to overthrow the government and broadcast pro-Russian propaganda. In a chaotic manner, they bombard civilian infrastructure in such cities with artillery. Thus, there is a real threat of a humanitarian catastrophe within the following cities: Mariupol, Kharkiv, Izyum, Berdyansk, Sumy, Irpen, Gostomel, etc. Here people do not have electricity, heating, water supply, and the store shelves are empty.

Reportedly, Mariupol residents have had to drink water from puddles for the past few days. The city authorities report 10,000 civilians killed during the war. Thanks to negotiations on a political level, humanitarian corridors become available for the evacuation of the population and for the import of food. While some of them succeed, often the enemy army breaks agreements and fires at convoys with old people, women and children. As of today, more than six thousand cars have left Mariupol, which is almost razed to the ground now, along one of these corridors. Many people are received by the churches in the Zaporozhye region. In the near future, we will be involved in the process of transporting people who flee from Mariupol to the borders with Europe.

Every night, the occupiers insidiously launch ballistic missiles and carry out airstrikes on cities that are safe for now, including those bordering with the EU. For example, on the morning of March 13, from a distance of 1600 km, eight missiles were fired from the territory of the Russian Federation at the Lviv region. On the night of March 16, there was an unexpected missile attack on Zaporozhye. One of the rockets was neutralized, and the second fell near the railway station, a kilometer from the building of our church. Fortunately, there were no casualties.

Now, as for the churches that are under occupation or in combat zones. These are churches in Avdiivka, Berdyansk, Balkove, Kutuzovka, Andriivka and Molochansk. All the churches are reporting food and essentials shortages. Everything that can be bought at the places costs ridiculously

expensive: a grid of potatoes is \$50, and a grid of onions is \$30. Apart from food, the possibility of transferring money to ministers to the war zone remains. There are also reports of looting by the Russian military due to lack of supplies in their army.

During the 22 days of the war, we have developed a strategy that allows us to help the churches in two ways: the evacuation of people to west of Ukraine and the shipping of necessary goods to the affected territories. We have formed two teams of 15 people in the cities of Mukachevo and Zdolbuniv near the EU border. People in our teams handle the strategic points mentioned above. Locals, businesspersons and Christian organizations here in western Ukraine are helping us out by donating tons of vegetables, flour and sugar when they learn we are involved in transporting these goods to war zones. We also receive a huge amount of help from churches of Lithuania. They have crossed the border to meet with us in person and hand us over the relief. We are expecting them with a second batch of humanitarian aid soon. We are grateful to everyone who contributes to this work and for your generous donations for people affected by the war. Thank you for your commitment and dedication! The funds you send are distributed among all churches of our association, including those encircled.



The prices for many types of vital goods are growing every day, but your financial support literally saves people's lives and all our activities are based on it at this time. The funds you send are distributed inside the churches of our association, including those encircled. Your donations help us prevent a humanitarian catastrophe and evacuate people from dangerous areas. Special thanks to everyone who accepts our refugees in Europe, warmly welcomes and provides for them. This is an invaluable help.

On behalf of the AMBCU, I also thank you for your intensified prayer support during this difficult time. Thank you for the warmth and affection you have been showing and for your open hearts.

Please, get acquainted with an interactive map showing the ministries of our association:

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1AiaNec4PUwDZYrDyL0i22ITLoQDh60bo&ll=49.650736849642264%2C23.161948499999994&z=5>

Red - churches in the occupied zone

Yellow - churches near the war zone

Purple - places where refugees can rest on the way to the border

Green - coordination centers for humanitarian work, the main one is in Mukachevo.

Prayer requests:

1. Peace in Ukraine, end of suffering in the country
2. Families that are divided by the war
3. Ministers in dangerous areas
4. Churches in encircled areas under the Russian oppression

Affectionately yours

Roman Rakhuba

Head of AMBCU