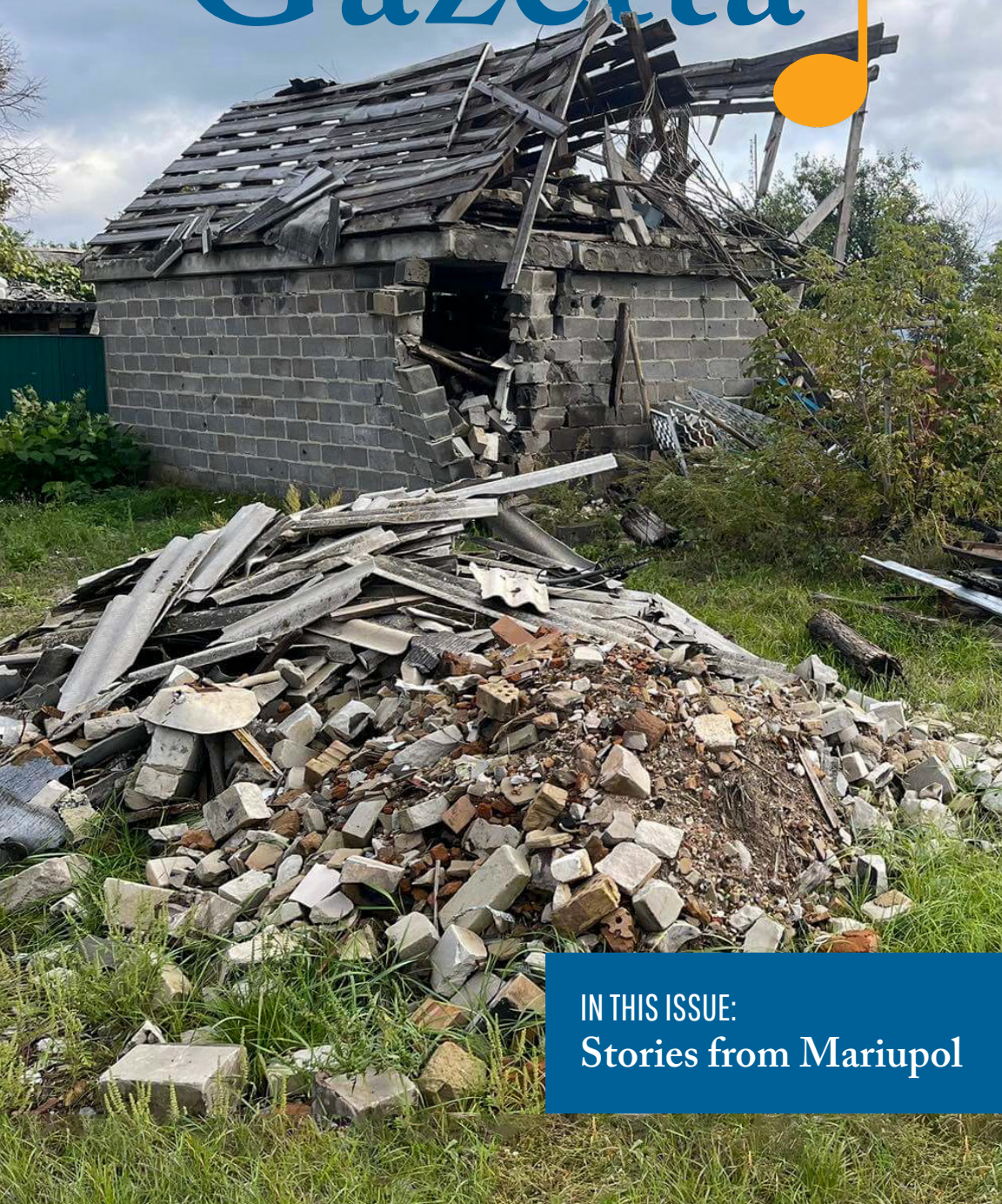


the Gazette



IN THIS ISSUE:
Stories from Mariupol

Using the sacred classics to proclaim the Gospel to the country of Ukraine and the world.



Smoke rising over Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital - Credit: Finbarr O'Reilly for The New York Times

OUR STORY

Since 1992, Music Mission Kiev has served as a beacon of hope to those in Ukraine through sacred music.

Over the last three decades, God has transformed Music Mission Kiev from a small Orchestra and Chorus to a dynamic evangelistic ministry that serves people in Kyiv and reaches beyond the borders of Ukraine to other countries in the former Soviet Union.

Music Mission Kiev uses sacred music to share the Gospel with a country that lived under years of spiritual suppression. Music and evangelism come together to serve those in need.



Ukrainian-Led,
American-Supported

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Recounting The War

By Dr. Vadym Shevchenko, Ophthalmologist

On February 24, 2022, we were awakened early by the sounds of bombs and overhead passes of jet fighters above our houses. The jets were so loud that our bodies were trembling. It was the horrifying noise of a word we all feared, “war”. This terrible word came into our lives and changed them forever. War!

Somewhere in our hearts, we had understood that war was possible, but it was difficult to cope with the fact that war had actually begun. Bombs were falling, and our children were very afraid. The truth is that everyone was afraid, but we knew it was important to keep the fear from conquering us. As a parent, I started thinking about what was the immediate priority.

Like every father, I hoped that my children and family would be safe from the horror that erupted around us. I quickly gathered important documents and other essentials, and sent my children by car to Western Ukraine, away from the borders of Russia. Everyone around me did the same.

The children and other refugees didn’t take many clothes, food, water, and medicines, as everyone was hoping they would soon return. I tried to calm the children, explaining that now we would play a game where they needed to behave quietly and listen to their mother, and there may be “fireworks” around. I told them if they behaved they would get delicious candy, and all would be well! I reassured them, “I’m sure that everything will be fine.” The road to Uzhhorod took more than two days (about 8 hours by car in peacetime), but that’s a story for another time, as I stayed behind and did not witness it.

My city, Irpin, is located near the Hostomel airport. The sirens rang constantly as the bombing commenced. I saw fascist helicopters and fighter jets overhead. We understood that their goal was to capture Kyiv, and that they would go through Irpin to achieve it.

Since the children were already on their way, it was easier for me to navigate the situation alone. I took some documents and clothes for two days. I went to work in Kyiv, where I performed my duties as a doctor. The next day I began to participate in the Territorial Defense. I ended up staying in Kyiv until the liberation of Irpin in the spring.

Unfortunately, I had to remember many skills that I thought I would never need to use. I saw many things I never desired to see. I was reminded over and over again that all people have red blood. The evenings were dark, and the nights were VERY cold and windy. I was very upset with myself that I did not pack more warm clothes. The smoke from the fires we used at night warmed us but burned our eyes. Since I am an ophthalmologist, I knew how to alleviate the suffering of the eyes.

My phone connection was unstable, the internet was only available infrequently, and my phone battery was often dead. This added additional anxiety, as it did not allow me to be in regular contact with relatives. However, it didn't take long for me to find out that our house was completely destroyed. We made an interesting discovery in our destroyed home. Our children's Bible remained intact and undamaged, along with the tools and supplies I use in the Medical Ministry.

It is difficult to think of the effects of this war on my country, my people and my family. Thank God, he gave us all the strength to be alive and strong in this war. I had heard about wars from the stories of my grandmother and grandfather but never thought this type of event could happen again. Now we suffer, struggle, and pray. Irpin was one of the first cities to be attacked and one of those that suffered the most. Thankfully I was able to stay in the MMK office in Kyiv until I could arrange new housing.

Being involved with the Territorial Defense meant that I was unable to continue my normal medical services for the widows and pensioners in our program. Pastor Ruslan stepped in and helped provide our most vulnerable with necessities like food and medicines.

When the situation in Kyiv became a little calmer toward the late spring, we resumed meetings with widows and I managed to coordinate a schedule with my service to them. It was wonderful to meet again after being separated for three months due to the consequences of that terrible word, "War". We met with tears in our eyes, strong hugs, and gratitude to God that each of us are ALIVE.



We all believe the Lord gives Ukraine this trial to make it stronger. We sincerely believe this, because we see everything and witness the help that the Lord continues to give us. We remain strong friends, allies, brothers and sisters in Christ, and ordinary people who want the victory of good over evil.

Your prayers and words of encouragement, are so important and very helpful. Unfortunately, the war in Ukraine continues, and children and adults are still dying and our cities are still being destroyed. However, we all believe in our victory over fascist Russia and there WILL be PEACE on our land.

May God bless you all with Peace and may you never experience the horrors of war!

Glory to Ukraine! Glory to God!

Poems From Ukraine

“The Lord Is With Us” by Vera M. (Widow in our program)

Summer is passing quickly, soon fall and winter will come,
Our hearts are broken for there is war in Ukraine.
We often look into the sky – our Lord, You see everything,
How much suffering and pain have been brought by this war.

God, we pray and ask, protect Ukraine,
Our soldiers, our heroes – bring them back alive!
We, Ukrainians, are peaceful people who live in our land,
We defend our motherland – Lord, give us strength.

Holy Father! Our Savior! We all trust in You!
You are our wise Ruler and will not leave us!
Peace will come to Ukraine! Our land will be brought back to life!
God will bring the victory! Our fields and orchards will bloom again!

The whole St. Paul's Church is praising the Name of the Lord,
For care, for help, for God's family.
Peace will come to independent and united Ukraine,
For we all believe and know that the Lord has not left us.

The Lord sees and knows everything! He will punish those non-humans
For every Ukrainian they killed.
Soon peace will come to Ukraine – our only land,
Glory to our heroes! Our not overcome country will sustain!

Poem by Nadiia B. (Widow in our program from Mariupol)

Don't be down, the City of Mary,
Your Victory day is coming.
Soon the dreams of spring shall come true
Making us rejoice.
You are destined to have Heroes
Who will leave a mark
And who are holding our freedom
And fighting like Atlantes for us.
The world is praying for you
With crystal tears welling up
You, Mariupol, will survive
As well as Heroes from Azovstal!
You will never bow your knees
Under the enemy's attack
Because Ukraine is our land,
Ours it will remain!!!

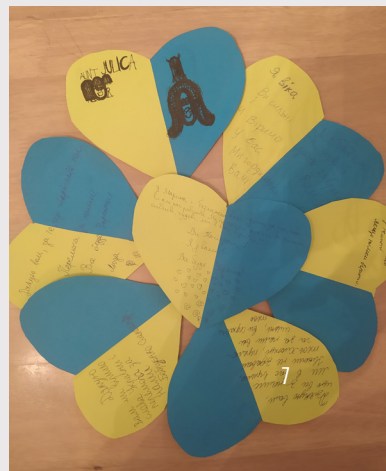


New Autistic Group

By Vika Rybchinska, Children's Music Club

We recently started a group for autistic kids and their families. With financial help from Xenia Presbyterian Church in Ohio, we met for the first time on August 19. These gatherings have gone really well. Pastor Ruslan speaks with the parents while Vika works with the kids. The children wrote cards for our Ukrainian soldiers, which were delivered to the wounded soldiers in a nearby hospital. They also play active games and put puzzles together. Artyom, a kid with autism, needed special attention and care so Vika worked with him separately. Now he wants to take a piano lesson with me (and two other kids also expressed interest). At the end of our time together, Pastor Ruslan prayed, took pictures, gave out some food vouchers, and a Ukrainian children's Bible. Two of the kids came the next day to the St. Paul's Church worship service.

Everyone in attendance was thankful for the support and hospitality.



Surviving the City of Death

By Nadiia B., Widow from Mariupol

Greetings! I am Nadiia Boiko from Mariupol, Ukraine. I am a Mariupol poetess, a colonel of the Ukrainian Cossacks, and a member of literary and choir associations. I cannot sing now, but I'm writing poems about the war. I am especially concerned about the fate of Mariupol defenders - the Azovites - who have been in the hell of captivity for almost four months. Let's hold on and believe! I was called Nadia (which means Hope in Ukrainian) for a reason.

I have three children and three grandchildren. I have plenty of friends. I could never afford to buy a flat or a nice car or to go on holiday abroad but, right before the war, I received an international passport and we were planning to make a family vacation trip to Egypt the following summer. Then everything changed. I am not leaving this country, I stand with my people and my children and I firmly believe the war will end one day and our dreams will come true.

My city was turned into ruins by Russians who now occupy and control it.. Skeletons of destroyed buildings are all that is left of the once flourishing city. There are no parks, no skating rinks, no cozy little streets and avenues, and no trees and flowers left. The drama theater is also gone.

Not for nothing is it called the City of Death as most of its territory is turned into a cemetery. According to the latest estimations, 87,000 dead civilians were documented here. The neighboring country treacherously attacked us and is butchering non-combatants and destroying the infrastructure of Ukrainian towns and villages.

Since March 2, there has been no water or food, no heat or communications in Mariupol. Isolated from the rest of the world, people had to hide in bomb shelters. Many of those who dared to leave the shelter in search of water never returned. Heavy fighting lasted for three months taking people's lives every single day. Some managed to leave the city, some didn't...



I fled Mariupol together with my granddaughter at the beginning of the war, but my husband Mykhailo refused to leave. He said that everything would end soon and promised to wait for us at home. He was killed on March 20. Our eldest grandson buried him under the balcony of our house a week after he died because of heavy shelling. My grandson Andrii, a handsome sailor, was also killed leaving two little daughters behind.

The Azov Regiment and other Ukrainian defenders of Mariupol held out to the last in an unequal battle. Together with the civilian population, they stayed in the underground shelters of the Azovstal Iron and Steel Works until May 16. These fighters restrained the advance of the Russian army in other directions. They survived the horror of bombardment with five-ton bombs, shelling, and chemical weapons. They received an order to leave the territory of the plant and were promised an exchange. Since May 16, they have been detained in brutal captivity. At the end of July, more than 50 Azov members were killed and 114 were injured in a deadly blast in the colony of Olenivka. What awaits the brave defenders who are still in captivity?

The enemy wants to execute them. My daughter and her husband are also kept as prisoners of war. Their 15-year-old daughter is with me. We travel around the country, rent accommodations, and hope to see them someday. The fact that there has been no contact with my daughter since April 12 makes it even harder. I also mourn the fact that I will never be able to hug my beloved husband.

The war, treacherous and insidious, destroys lives and dreams and separates us forever from dear ones. And how many children were killed or maimed? No one knows when the trouble will stop knocking on our door and stop crawling like a snake into the souls of my people. It is horrible when a neighboring brotherly nation is capable of such evil.

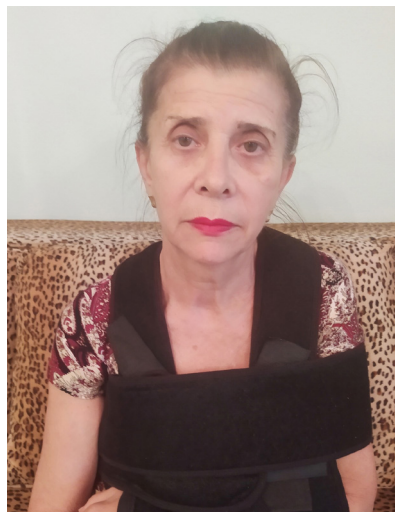
Everyone in this war has their own story, and their own grief because there is no Ukrainian who hasn't suffered. How many tears are shed and how many graves are dug in Ukraine every day? But we defend our country with all our might and we are very grateful to everyone who helps us. The American and European governments support us, give us weapons, and we will definitely win, it's just a matter of time. May this nightmare never happen again and may no one experience the fear of war, may the children look into the blue sky without terror, and may wheat grow abundantly in Ukrainian lands again.

In conclusion, I should say that broken dreams can still come true, and cities can be rebuilt, but who can bring back to life those who were killed by the Russians? Let the whole world pray for peace and victory and the enemy will inevitably be defeated!

Melting Snow and Dirty Potatoes

By Viktoriia S., Communications Specialist, with Valentyna P., Widow from Mariupol

“A beautiful city it used to be”, remembers Valentyna. “Nice new roads, lush green parks, squares with musical fountains and multicolored flower beds. As a result of decentralization, with local authorities getting additional power and resources, new schools and hospitals were built in the city. Being a center for industry, Mariupol had the highest salary rates in Ukraine. Nobody expected and nobody wanted the Russians to come and ‘liberate’ us”.



Living near war conflict is nothing new for Valentyna. Her city was under attack in 2015, and lots of people died or were maimed at that time. Hard shells landed in Valentyna’s residential district Vostochnyi. The shock wave smashed glass in most windows. The broken glass was like sand everywhere in the streets.

When the war broke out on February 24, people were in no hurry to leave their native city. They believed the war would not last long. But when the enemy planes started dropping bombs on schools and hospitals Valentyna and all her relatives gathered together, collected all the food from their homes, and hurried to the bomb shelter. “I didn’t take anything valuable. When you see dead people in the streets, your possessions are no longer of any value to you,” she said.

“There were 16 of us, 10 adults and 6 children. The most frustrating thing was keeping the kids happy. To make it less scary in the dark cold and dusty shelter I was telling them fairy tales. After many long hours, I was short of stories and started inventing new ones till I was tongue-tied. The kids couldn’t have fresh air as the city was under constant shelling”. However, shelling wasn’t the only danger since they were running out of water and food. “We had a bag of potatoes which we ate dirty as we had to economize on water. It was one potato for a person a day, half in the morning and another half in the evening. To get water we melted snow from the car roofs. One glass of boiled water was shared between three people during the day. We were afraid of dehydration but it was

too dangerous to go in search of water. Many young people who left the shelter in search of water were killed”.

The dead were buried in the yards right next to the buildings. “Nobody had time and energy to dig deep so the dead were buried in shallow makeshift graves. Before the war, we used to bury our pet cats with more of a ceremony,” complains Valentyna. “We were lucky to have young strong relatives with us in the bomb shelter. They could cut trees and bring heavy logs to make a fire and keep us warm. I cannot imagine what it was like for lonely old people who were not healthy enough to take care of themselves. Many of them died of hunger, dehydration, or cold”.

Having spent three weeks in the besieged city, Valentyna’s family decided to make an attempt to escape Mariupol. “Everybody was crying as we were not sure we would get out of the city safely. A long line of cars was moving carefully along small city streets. We were all praying,” remembers the woman.

They made it through numerous checkpoints and filtration centers. The whole journey took many days. Sometimes they had to pull off the road to let the Russian tanks pass. They spent several nights in the open field. The inside of the car was covered in ice as the temperature was below zero. Near Berdyansk city, Valentyna witnessed a heartbreaking scene. “Hundreds and hundreds of people, mostly elderly and women with small kids as well as pregnant women were dragging heavy bags to the evacuation buses outside the city. They had to walk more than five kilometers, but there was no guarantee they would get on the bus because there were simply not enough buses for all. I wish I could have taken a picture then and shown it to the whole world.”

When Valentyna and her family finally reached Zaporizhia, they all cried when they saw bread and finally had a proper meal in more than three weeks. They are renting a big flat in Kyiv now. Most of the adults have health issues after everything they had to go through. Valentyna had an operation and met a woman in the hospital who invited her to St. Paul’s Church. She is happy to study the Bible and says she feels well cared for in the church. She is grateful to the MMK for all the support. “Nobody invited the Russians to our land,” concludes Valentyna. “We had a beautiful city and a beautiful life. All we need now is prayer and more weapons to liberate our land. We want to live peacefully in our dear city. I am looking forward to going back to Mariupol and I am ready to work hard and rebuild it with my own hands”.

Summer Camp in Germany

By Oksana Polevichenko, Children's Outreach Coordinator

I'm sure that God guides each of us along His path.

When I arrived in Germany at the beginning of the war in, it seemed that I had lost my way. After all, everything that I had been building my entire life, all my prospects and plans were ruined, and all I could see ahead was emptiness.

Then God directed me to a church where I offered to take part in the ministry which I'd been involved for many years. Music Mission Kiev is where I learned and practiced serving children in Sunday school. Those were no ordinary kids, but the ones from foster families who had faced tough times in life.

At Sunday school in Germany, we came up with the idea of a summer camp. We thought that it would be good for the Ukrainian children to immerse themselves in a special Christian atmosphere where they would be surrounded by everything Ukrainian for a few days.



Having many years of experience organizing camps, we managed to prepare effectively, select the team, create the program, and handle the finances. We prayed a lot, and the Lord blessed us abundantly. He stirred the hearts of Ukrainian church-goers in Germany to join and minister in the camp.

The concept we had chosen for the camp was the crew of a ship sailing into the wonderful golden city overcoming obstacles, storms, and bad weather on the way. But in order to reach the goal, the crew needed a reliable captain. The Captain is Jesus Christ, who helps us get the ship out of trouble and guides it through dangers.



The idea of the camp was to get the message across to the children that there is a storm in their lives. And to overcome that storm, they really need to listen to the voice of our Captain (Jesus Christ) and watch the compass (the Bible).

There were 80 kids in the camp and they had a wonderful time doing sports, making crafts, playing adventure games, singing wonderful Christian songs, performing various tasks, participating in theater productions, and, of course, having exciting Bible lessons. The kids were repenting and praying—they were enveloped in God's love and care.



We will continue working with these children whose hearts are wounded by war, separation from relatives, loneliness, and sad memories.

We need prayers and support from those whose hearts are open to visitors and travelers because it is very difficult to live far from home, relatives, and usual life.

May God bless us to fulfill His purpose in the land where He placed us.

Ukrainian Ballet Success

By Greg Kannon, CEO



For over a month, I have been writing and blogging on Music Mission Kiev's participation and partnership with the Ukrainian Ballet Benefit held in Orlando on August 27, in Steinmetz Hall at the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts. The goal was to raise \$500,000 to support Ukraine and divided it between Razom for Ukraine, UNICEF, and the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress. I am happy to report the event raised over \$800,000 and was a world-class production.

Former MMK VP Marc McMurrin led this effort through the Ginsburg Foundation. Our very own conductor, Vika Konchakovska conducted the Bach Festival Chorus singers and the Orlando Opera singers before and during the program. One person commented they had never seen Vika smiling and laughing as much as she did during her time here. Sergii Golubnichy conducted the Orlando Symphony Orchestra for all the ballet music.

MMK had the joy of sponsoring the Silent Auction for the fundraising event. The paintings, carvings, and souvenirs were all originals from Ukrainian artists. This part of the event also was highly successful and made a large contribution to the event's total sum.

We also had the opportunity to help drive a number of the members of the ballet group to New Smyrna Beach for their day off and host them at the home of a gracious donor. For most of them, it was not only their first

trip to America, but also the first time they had ever seen the Atlantic Ocean. My wife Donna and I had a great time getting to know many of the ballet members. The day was filled with good food and great memories. Each performer in the ballet signed posters that were auctioned off during the benefit. We were fortunate to be given one which is now posted in our US office.



Vika conducts Bach Festival Choir

At both the Sponsor's dinner on Thursday evening and at the performance on Saturday, we made great connections in the Central Florida area with some important people. We hope our new friends will be able to open many doors for our own Kyiv Symphony Orchestra and Chorus when we come on Tour to the US in 2023. Vika and Sergii made even more relationships with people whom I did not have the opportunity to meet. I believe it is safe to say that Orlando will be ready for the KSOC when they are next in this area.



Sergii conducts The Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra

Thank you to all of you who prayed for this major event and for the important connections we sought. God blessed us and He blessed the benefit to aid Ukraine. We are all grateful to have been a part of these incredible 3 weeks.



School Back in Session at Stara Basan Orphanage

By Vika Rybchinska, Children's Music Club



Our ministry at Stara Basan has fully re-engaged with the Stara Basan orphanage. Pastor Ruslan, Viktoriia, and Sasha have heard the horror stories of the Russians occupying the property twice as they sheltered in the basement with little food. Let me share my impressions about our recent trip to Stara Basan orphan boarding school.

Pastor Ruslan, Sasha, Sasha's daughter Kira, and I left for Stara Basan in the morning. On our way, we saw a completely blown-up bridge, many destroyed houses, and signs that read "dangerous mines" on the outskirts of villages. It was a stark reminder of the ongoing war.

Two teachers met us on the property of the boarding school and gave us a short tour. Stara Basan was occupied for a month, and during that time, Russian soldiers drove around the village in tanks. The occupying soldiers lived on the boarding school premises and the school cooks were required to prepare food for them in the cafeteria. School headmaster Yuri, regularly brought food for the staff and the children, although Russians pointed a rifle at him more than once and constantly shot into the air above his head to intimidate him.

The teachers, nurse, guard, and 18 children lived in the cellar for a month. It was very cold in the cellar and there was no food, so the adults went outside to bring it from the dining room. They all ate and spent nights with the children there in the cellar. Fortunately, the school premises remained intact after the soldiers left.



Cellar/bunker they stayed in during the occupation.

The headmaster told us they now have 58 children, and 11 more are staying in Poland. On the day of our visit, 29 children were at school because some were away at relatives' homes for the weekend. The children were upset and scared, and we felt very sorry for them. I played games with the boys and girls.

Oleh, the youngest one, gave me and Ruslan two of his bagels. The boy is very sick; he has to be careful when playing because there is a shunt in his head. Some of the kids gave me a tour of the boarding school. Then we took a picture together and sang the song "Oh, the Red Viburnum in the Meadow", a Ukrainian patriotic march now a hit in Ukraine. Pastor Ruslan prayed for the kids while Sasha and I gave out sweets.

Then they all accompanied us to the car, asking us when we were returning and if we could stay with them. On my way back to Kyiv, I was thinking about those children. I really want to help them so that they grow up as good decent people, regardless of their circumstances at this time in their life. I want their hearts filled with love, peace, and calmness, and what's most important is for them to have God in their lives.



Parting Word

A WORD FROM THE CEO

Here we are at nine months of the war in Ukraine, and we see no slowing down. As we move toward the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays, it is clear the war will impact family celebrations in Ukraine. The anticipated shortages of gas and the military targeting of the Ukrainian power grid will make for a challenging winter season. We are taking steps to address the needs for this winter and beyond. We have contracted with a Ukrainian company to purchase a blanket for each widow, pensioner, and child under our care along with a pair of warm sheepskin slippers to help combat the freezing temperatures. As we continue to care for our widows and pensioners, we are also tending to the needs of more and more Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). The IDPs are coming to Kyiv from other areas of Ukraine that have either been destroyed or occupied by the Russian military. Many come with nothing; bringing only the trauma of their experience. They too are receiving blankets and slippers to help them survive the winter.



Furry sheepskin slippers

Doors are opening to partner with churches in three different communities to help rebuild homes there. In the near future, we hope to organize several short-term missions for those who have construction experience and a desire to make a difference for the newly homeless.

We are also engaging in new opportunities with organizations that help with prosthetics and rehabilitation for civilians and soldiers injured in this unjust war. We want to partner with them to provide holistic care for men, women, and children. Our staff who are certified in Trauma Healing will find many ways to help people heal from the unseen wounds of this war.

Vika Rybchinska delivering groceries to widow Valentina B.





Markariv and the villages of Zabyannya and Lypovka (not far from the west of Kyiv)

MMK will need your help to continue with our existing ministries and the new opportunities God is opening for us. We hope to provide a KSOC Christmas concert for everyone in Kyiv and gifts to lift their spirits as they focus on the birth of Jesus, whose reign will end war, death, and suffering. Please consider how you might help support the vital and necessary work we are doing in the coming days, weeks, and months in Ukraine. Together, we can change lives in positive ways toward Peace in Ukraine and glory to God.

“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

MATTHEW 25:34-36

Grace and peace,

Greg

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