


the **Gazetta**



IN THIS ISSUE:
Voices of Ukraine



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

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,
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Overcoming Evil and Bitterness With Good

By Serhiy Basarab, VP of Ukrainian Operations

One man told me recently, “The war has sharply divided our lives into ‘BEFORE’ and ‘AFTER’ chapters. Life would never be the same again.” I concurred with him wholeheartedly. Only for my family, this dividing line was further sharpened by the symptoms of a serious illness my son began to experience on the second day of the Russian invasion on February 25.

We tried to schedule an appointment with a couple of doctors, but all they could offer was a phone consultation and recommendations concerning medicines, which were hard to get. The pharmacies began to shut down, and the lines to those that stayed open were extremely long. We sat in our apartment listening to the air raid sirens and the sounds of powerful explosions trying to figure out what our next steps could be. And so did the rest of my MMK colleagues and their families. Most of them fled from Kyiv moving to different parts of Western Ukraine and some to other countries. In the process, their families were separated, and this only exacerbated their pain.

At times, it seemed that our lives would fall apart and our MMK mission could follow suit. But God—in His great mercy—prevented this from happening. Even in the darkest days of the Russian onslaught, when Kyiv was hit by missiles and shells every day, Pastor Ruslan (whose family fled to France) was driving all over the city delivering much needed medicines and food to our widows and other people in need. Vika K. stays in close touch with all of the KSOC members and encourages them and all the



MMK staff members (on Viber) with a daily Psalm of her choosing. Although Olga A. spent every evening and night in the bomb shelter, she found time to respond to numerous phone calls and wire funds to different accounts to meet many urgent needs.



When the situation in Kyiv continued to deteriorate well into the second week of March, I took my family to a safe spot in Western Ukraine where my son could finally be hospitalized. I am deeply grateful to the people in that tiny village who opened their homes and hearts to us. Through them, God continued to care for me and my family. While we stayed there, I walked past a large poster on the roadside almost every day that read, “Praise the Lord that my eyes have seen the morning of a new day.” All of us in Ukraine, no matter what region we were in, learned to appreciate this as the BIGGEST blessing.

My family returned to Kyiv on April 18. We saw many traces of death and devastation all around us as we approached the city: annihilated logistical warehouses (that were among the largest in Ukraine), destroyed homes and large supermarkets, charred remains of cars, and notices: ‘The area is mined.’ When my children and I observed these scenes, my heart was filled with great sadness and anger. How could such great evil be allowed to manifest itself so shamelessly in the heart of Europe?

I had to make an effort to restrain myself with a Bible verse that has become central to me in the past two months: Romans 12:21, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” It is a source of spiritual strength. At the same time, it presents an enormous challenge.

How could I keep from being overcome by bitterness and exasperation when in late April, several Russian missiles hit the area very close to the hospital where my son was recovering after a complicated surgery? He was on an IV which had to be suddenly interrupted. He was put in a wheelchair and taken to the underground bomb shelter. It was an extremely uncomfortable night, he told me later.

How could I keep from being overcome by anger when I heard about Russian tanks rolling into Stara Basan and parking on the premises of the orphanage where we often interacted and played with the kids?

And yet that challenging verse is a call to obedience. That’s how my colleagues and I have perceived it. And that’s why we have made every effort to supply Stara Basan orphans and teachers who stayed with them with food and much needed medicines. We jumped at the first opportunity to resume the in-person widows’ gatherings in April. We felt how they longed for not just Auchan food vouchers, but also spiritual food and fellowship. And, finally, we decided to resume in-person weekly St. Paul’s services on May 7. I was pleasantly surprised by a big turnout at the first service.

As I write these words during the second week of May, the air raid sirens here in Kyiv remind me that the war is far from over. Only the Lord knows when and how it will end. I firmly believe His promise that He will rise up to confront our oppressors. He has already performed great miracles by protecting our families and us. He is also preserving and strengthening the mission during this perilous time.

He has been doing that through you, our faithful supporters in the United States. I am deeply grateful for your unceasing prayers and gifts that help us continue important work in Kyiv and other war-torn areas of Ukraine.

May the Lord help all of us submit to His wisdom and learn in a deeper way what it means to overcome evil with good.

War Experiences in Ukraine

By Viktoria Skriabina (*Communications Specialist*)
& Sergey Kuchma (*I.T. & Media Specialist*)



On the 24th of February, Sergey K., who lives 10 km from Kyiv, was awakened at 5 a.m. by his son's words: "The war has started!" His words were followed by the sound of explosions in Kyiv... it was a Thursday—the day the Bible lesson for widows usually took place. But not any longer. Everything had changed ... Absolutely everything.

On day one of the invasion, Sergey picked up his in-laws, who live in Kyiv, and brought them to his home. When his brother's family arrived at his home later that same day, they realized a cruel reality had changed their lives forever.

On day two, with the Russian invaders surrounding Kyiv, Sergey realized that he had to prepare to defend his family. He joined the Territorial Defense Forces, the military reserve component of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Armed only with a handgun, Sergey was told to stay at home and guard his own family. Those who received machine guns went to the checkpoints on the outskirts of the city.

The third day saw heavy fighting in Irpin and Bucha (just 7 km from Sergey's home). Ukrainian troops blew up the bridges that cross the local rivers, becoming a key natural barrier that stopped the enemy from entering Kyiv. Sergey says, "From my house, we can still see the remains of the concrete fortifications (bunkers) on the other side of the Irpin River, which did not prevent the Nazis from capturing Kyiv in 1941. However, modern fortifications and the stiff resistance of the Ukrainians were able to stop the new Russian fascists."

In the face of adversity, the people united. The Armed Forces of Ukraine heroically fought the enemy, the civilian population joined the Territorial Defense Forces, and our Western partners supplied weapons from the first days of the war.

When the Russian invaders encountered stiff resistance from the Ukrainians and realized they would not immediately capture Kyiv, they started shelling the city regularly. Sergey shares, “Shells and rockets flew over our heads. Glass rattled and the plaster crumbled from the walls of the house.” Just a few kilometers from his house, the invaders shot and wounded civilians in the streets.

Most of Sergey’s neighbors left on the third day. At night, the pitch silence was broken only by the crack of the guns and the sound of missile explosions. The Russian hit squads could arrive at any time.



A week later, shells were whistling closer and closer to Sergey’s village. The houses on the outskirts were destroyed, a large logistics center caught fire from the shelling, and a dark cloud of smoke covered the village.

When there was less than one second between the departure and the impact of the projectiles, Sergey realized that direct tank battles had begun on the outskirts of the village, and he had to do something to rescue his family. For them, Russian occupation was worse than death.

On the tenth day of the war, Sergey’s family left the house where they had lived for only three months and went to his parent’s place (150 km to the south of Kyiv). They weren’t sure they would ever return.

Sergey then enrolled in the military registration and enlistment office and joined the local territorial defense battalion. He knew they needed help to protect key strategic facilities in the neighborhood—a hydroelectric power station with a dam and a gas pipeline to Europe. Sergey remembers, “I realized the important truth there—Ukrainians cannot be defeated! We will never become slaves and return to the Soviet past. Our people changed, the turning point being perhaps the Maidan revolution in 2014 when we became free. I saw that every villager was ready to take up arms—be that hunting weapons or a pitchfork—and defend their land.”



Three weeks later, the Armed Forces of Ukraine drove the enemy from Kyiv and the northern regions. Soon many checkpoints were removed, and Sergey’s family could return home. Their little house was intact. Praise God the enemy did not manage to capture their village!

Sergey concludes, “Ukrainians are doing their best. There is still much to be done before the monsters who came to our land are defeated. But Ukraine will undoubtedly win and take its territories back. And the savages with warped morals who came from a neighboring country will become a thing of the past.” 7

Oksana's War Experiences

By Viktoria Skriabina (*Communications Specialist*)
& Oksana Polevichenko (*Children's Ministries Pastor*)

On February 24, at 4 a.m., Oksana's husband, Sergei, who is actively employed in the military, received a call and was told to go to the military base urgently. Explosions could be heard near her house. The war had begun.

Oksana remembers, "I had no idea what I should do and how to protect my children. I was overwhelmed, scared, and didn't know what was lying ahead. Stores were closing, the shelves emptied in a few hours. There were endless lines to pharmacies and gas stations, fuel was limited..."

The first thing that Oksana did was pray and ask God for wisdom. Immediately after that, a friend of hers, who lives in Germany, called and invited Oksana's family to come stay with them. Oksana hesitated, as it would involve traveling over 2,000 km from Kyiv. The following day, explosions were very close to her home and several Russian tanks drove into Oksana's district. There was a gunpowder smell in the air.

All alone with her children and a bag containing a few essentials, Oksana left Kyiv. Sadness and uncertainty filled her heart, but she hurriedly left while the opportunity for escape was still open.

It was then that Russian tanks reached Basan, the village in the East of Ukraine where Oksana's relatives lived and the orphan boarding school she visits is situated. It was a time of constant fasting and prayer. Only God gave her the strength to go on.



With God's help, Oksana's family managed to get to Germany. Friends gave them shelter and helped solve various problems that war refugees typically face. Only a month later did Oksana start to focus on what was going on in her life. She shares, "I feel that I probably grew 10 years older. A smile disappeared from my face. Even when I try to smile, I cannot do it properly." If you have ever met the always beaming Oksana, her comment is sobering.

Like many other Ukrainians who have been displaced from their homes, her heart is divided. One part remains in Ukraine where her husband and brother (who also joined the Armed Forces

of Ukraine) are, and the other one is in Germany with her children and elderly father. The kids miss their friends, their homes, and most of all, their fathers.

Everything is new and foreign to them. It is frightening to live where you don't know the language and everything about the surroundings are different from your home. Nevertheless, as believers, they all have hope to get strength and support from their heavenly Father no matter how far they are from home.



Oksana's kid's drawing: their fears



Oksana's son looking for privacy during Sunday school

In Wiesbaden, a city in western Germany, the local Baptist Church organized a church service for Ukrainians where both believers and non-believers could come. After all, everyone is looking for answers and joy from the Lord now more than ever before. Oksana had the opportunity to conduct a Sunday school class for children ages 8-11. There were about 20 of them in the class. She was happy to be of any help as she is cut off from the ministry that is dear to her. She continues to keep in touch, encourage, and pray with those who need it.

Oksana says, "I don't know when it will be possible for us to return home. But I know that God knows and He brought us to this place. He rescued us. We must remain faithful to Him in every place and at all times. We are connected with Ukraine by invisible ties and that's why we feel both worried and peaceful at the same time. We need to support those who are in need and testify of God's love and salvation. I am grateful to those who pray for us. It's not easy to be a refugee. Please continue to remember us in your prayers!"



Oksana & her husband, Sergei

Lena's War Experiences

By Lena Sagun (Coordinator of Widows' Ministry)

On the morning of February 24, my values changed: material things are not that important. The fear for the safety of my family and dear ones became paramount.

Running to the only bomb shelter in our neighborhood was very stressful. My son, Daniel, was in a foot cast and my grandfather was bed-bound, unable to leave the apartment. I had to carry Daniel downstairs from the 3rd floor with a backpack with food and water supply and our dog. We ran for two minutes. It was an awfully cold and overcrowded bomb shelter.



On the third day of the war, we decided to take shelter in our small apartment corridor. Each time the sirens began, Daniel would take a book and hop on one leg to the corridor. There he would start reading out loud in an effort to block the sound of the siren. When his reading reminded me of yelling, I understood I had to do something to rescue my son.

Finding any means of transportation in the city at that time was next to impossible. So I told the Lord if anything could be done, HE must help us. The following morning an old friend, also a single mother, called me and said she would take us to the train station. Within 30 minutes, I was at the train station with my son, dog, and a small backpack. My mother remained at home to care for her dying father.

We lived through the following 30 hours of non-stop moving only by God's strength: two trains with no restroom, only one seat for Daniel, and our dog had to lay on people's feet. They packed the train wagons with

people to the point that there was no place to stand, and it was hard to breathe. Upon arriving in Poland, I was contacted by a long-time Swedish friend offering help. So we traveled on to Sweden.

Sweden's support of Ukrainian refugees is cumbersome and slow. Receiving financial support has been delayed, and we had to move four times because we could not find a place to stay any length of time. One night I cried out to God, "I can clearly see YOUR hand having brought us here. Then why are we in a country that cannot cover our very basic needs of food and housing?!" The Lord told me, "For you to see MY hand providing for you."

Then I started seeing it. People whom we did not know were just giving help at the right time. A teacher in Daniel's school and our neighbors brought us bags of food. A stranger on the bus handed Daniel some money with the words, "I know it is hard for you." One lady brought a huge bag of dog food for our Glasha.

Then I said, "I see now, God. Now, what can I do for You here?" And the Lord started putting people in my path who needed to be listened to and supported. Sweden is a country of great contrast: a high level of social safety and economic opportunities with very little emphasis on God or faith. As a result, I believe, this contributes to the high rate of suicides among the youth. So I am trying to serve the Lord everywhere He puts me.

Though we are away from Ukraine, my mind and soul are in my home country. I recently found a picture that clearly speaks about my condition (see picture): "It is not my shadow. It is my soul." I am very thankful to MMK for making it possible to keep on working: preparing Bible lessons for our homebound widows, translating Zoom meetings, and staying in touch with our pensioners—all these activities bring me special joy.



My son, Daniel, is suffering from severe headaches. The doctor said he has too much tension in his body. My mother remains in Kyiv with a heart condition. Unfortunately, my grandfather died shortly after I arrived in Sweden. These concerns are always on my mind.

I want to thank every person whose spiritual and material support keeps MMK going! Be blessed!

Irina's War Experiences

By Viktoria Skriabina (Communications Specialist)
& Irina Donchenko (Minister of Pastoral Care)

Irina struggles for words when asked about the life of Ukrainian refugees who were forced to leave their country because of war.

Together with many other Ukrainian women, she arrived in Germany, in the region of Lower Saxony, not far from Hannover. Irina praises God with a grateful heart for His miraculous ways and the open hearts of the local people. The German government provides free accommodation and social aid to Ukrainian refugees. Irina shares, "We don't have to look for a place to live or worry about money. The people around us are just awesome!"

Ukrainian refugees gather for Easter



However, no matter how much Irina enjoys life in Germany and admires the beautiful nature around her, her heart is in Ukraine with her relatives and friends who remain there. Every morning she wakes up with the desire to take off running back home.



Ukrainian refugees gather for Easter

The Ukrainian refugees she keeps in touch with feel the same, but the war updates they hear each day stop them from doing so as they worry for their children's lives.

Irina is lucky to have other fellow Ukrainians living nearby. Nearly a hundred refugees are scattered in the region's small towns. They met to celebrate Ukrainian Easter together. People shared how hard it was for them to adapt to new places, new laws, and new rules. Not only adults but children as well are feeling the stress. The pain of losing a home is unbearable!

Irina says, "I exchanged contacts with some of my fellow people who are living nearby. We have already met for tea. I'm delighted to be able to support them and share the good news about God. We pray together for the victory and coming home soon."

To express her gratitude to the locals who took them in, Irina helps them tidy up their homes and plant vegetables in the garden. She also continues to serve the Lord in the local church.



Re-Establishment of Widows Gathering and St. Paul's Church

By Viktoria Skriabina (Communications Specialist)
& Ruslan Marchenko (Lead Pastor of St Paul's Church)



Widows' Gathering on April 28

When the Russian war against Ukraine began, Pastor Ruslan didn't leave Kyiv. Instead, he decided to join the Territorial Defense Forces, the military reserve component of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Arriving at the enlistment office, he saw hundreds of men waiting in line to register to serve. The authorities sent him home as there were not enough weapons for everyone. So instead of sitting idle, Ruslan began taking care of widows and others who desperately needed medicines and food as many shops and drug stores were closed.

Despite the dangerous situation in Kyiv, many widows were willing to resume their regular meetings in the church. The first gathering took place take place on April 11. We did not plan a Bible study, as Ruslan didn't know how many people to expect that day. He was surprised to see an impressive number of widows at the meeting. They gathered outside and started the meeting by praying for Ukraine, for the Ukrainian military, and

for all those who lost relatives or homes in the war. They also prayed for those who support Ukrainians and praised God for our friends all over the world. The elderly ladies were excited and happy to meet and pray together, even though it was dangerous to go outside as there were regular air raid alerts in Kyiv.

St. Paul's Church services also resumed at the Cathedral of Christ on May 7. There was a sermon, prayer, and communion for the first time since the beginning of the war. There was a good turnout, and it was great to be together again.

MMK also re-established our weekly Bible study for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). When the war broke, Ruslan managed to rescue many of them from Puscha, a small town near Kyiv, where the fighting was intense. He remembers, "People crammed into the car; they even managed to hide in the trunk of the car as it was really dangerous to stay in Puscha any longer." Thankfully, they all arrived safely in Kyiv.

Within a few days, some moved to other places and some remained in Kyiv. Six people came to the first Bible study meeting. One of the widows, Varvara, invited her son, who is a soldier. He came with his military friend, and they all prayed together as they were about to go to the frontline region. Pastor Ruslan shares, "It's really rewarding to see that we can support our soldiers. We provided them with food and military equipment, and it opened their hearts. So, they accepted the invitation and came to the Bible Study where we could pray for them."

The Bible lessons for IDPs will be held regularly on Tuesdays, and people are eager to come—they are hungry for God's Word.

St. Paul's Worship Service on May 7



Together Again

PASKA (EASTER) BREAD DISTRIBUTION

By Viktoria Skriabina (Communications Specialist), Ruslan Marchenko (Lead Pastor of St Paul's Church), and Vika Konchakovska (Conductor and Creative Director of Kyiv Symphony Orchestra and Chorus)



During conflicts of war, children, women, and the elderly are always impacted the most. Our mission didn't leave the widows to their own devices. On Easter, our mission organized a real treat for them. Pastor Ruslan shares, "Many of the women were surprised that we took care of and even brought paska (traditional Ukrainian Easter bread). We also distributed printouts with the Biblical lesson for them to study at home. With all our hearts, we wanted to support them and say comforting words during such a painful time. Ruslan says, "I noticed that the effects of war had aged many of them, at least it seemed so to me. The fact that we haven't left them and are supporting them even during the war gave them strength."

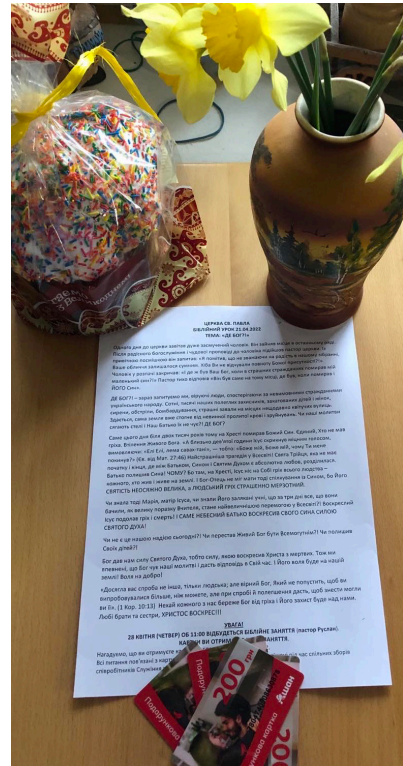
"What struck me the most," Vika remembers, "was their willingness to help others. Some of the women could hardly walk with a walking cane, but still, they asked for a few more paska packages to bring to their homebound friends. I saw how eager they were to bless as they were blessed."



After the Bible study, many widows came up to Ruslan to talk and express their gratitude. They treated him with sweets, and some even brought tithes to give to the church. “There is always an offering and tithe box in the church, and I’m impressed that even in such hardships, people are willing to humbly give to the church,” Ruslan says.

Ruslan and Vika, together with the widows, prayed for Ukraine’s victory in the war and asked God to change their own hearts toward Russia.

Pastor Ruslan encourages everyone who supports the widows during such a tough time with the words from 1 Corinthians 15:58, “...your labor in the Lord is not in vain,” and Ruslan adds, “God will definitely reward you. May the Lord our God reign in our lives. God bless Ukraine.”



500 loaves of Paska bread



Held By His Promise

A WORD FROM THE CEO

“Be strong and courageous! Don't be afraid and don't panic, for I, the Lord your God, am with you in all you do.

JOSHUA 1:9

Our Ukrainian staff's faithfulness and hope inspire me, and I grieve with them in the uncertainty. As I read through our their experiences since the Russian invasion on February 24, I experience conflicting emotions. I want to be strong and unafraid. I am simultaneously feeling the peace of knowing God is good and trustworthy while also feeling anguish and anger at the horrors and injustices happening to Ukraine.

Many years ago, I had a seminary professor who said, "as a pastor, you must get used to ambivalence, experiencing the highs and lows at the same time." That single comment has sustained me through many years of ministry. Merriam-Webster defines ambivalence as "your feelings about something are contradictory or mixed: you feel two (or more) ways about it."

I believe what Hebrews 11:1 says,

“**Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see.**”

However, I too am weary and emotionally worn because God allows this war to continue. Why hasn't God stepped in and brought an end to the destruction and death of the many innocent people in Ukraine?

Since the invasion began, I am grateful to have spoken or conversed through email with many of you. I sense many of you are also living through the ambivalence of the situation. We see many ways God is doing amazing and even miraculous things in Ukraine and beyond, but our hearts ache for this unjust war to end.



Destruction in Chernihiv region during Pastor Ruslan's trip in April to deliver aid

It is only because of how clearly God has been good, faithful, and trustworthy in my past that I can hold on to the trust and hope for an end to the war. Through that perspective, faith wins over the insecure feelings I have about it all. Romans 5 begins speaking of the peace we have from the faith in God's work through Jesus. Then it says in verses 3-5,

Not only this, but we also rejoice in sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

Having the faith to endure and hold onto hope in the midst of suffering is never an easy journey. Having faith requires little of us when everything is going well. I have no understanding of when this war will end and the rebuilding of Ukraine will begin. So, I cling to Joshua's reminder that God is with us, no matter the situation or outcome. I am praying over you and the men, women, and children in Ukraine. May they know they are not alone, that God is with them.

Grace and peace,

Greg

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