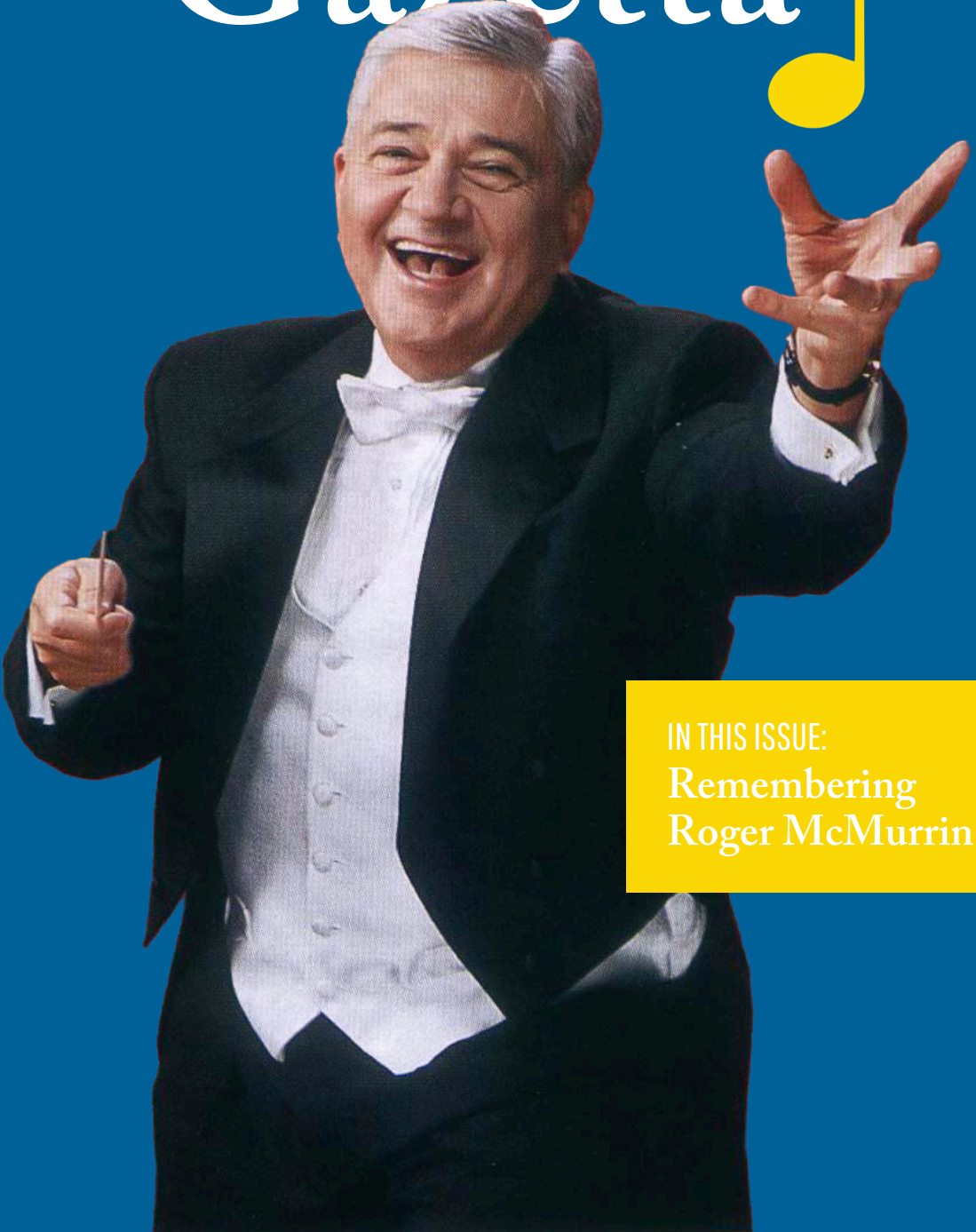


music mission KIEV
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the Gazette



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Remembering Roger McMurrin

MUSIC MISSION KIEV FOUNDER

1939–2023

Roger McMurrin, 84, founder of Music Mission Kiev (MMK) and Kyiv Symphony Orchestra and Chorus (KSOC) went home to his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, on Wednesday, December 13, 2023.

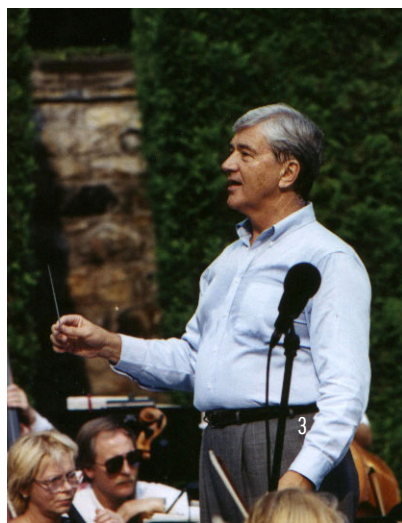
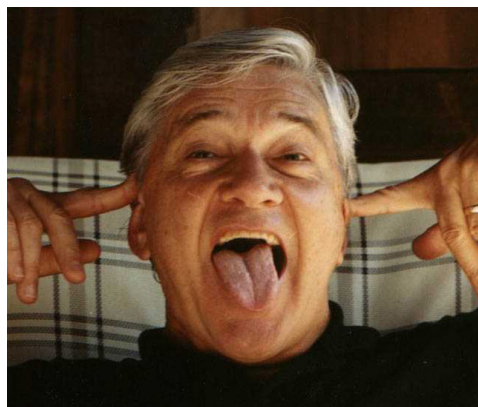
In 1971, McMurrin left Ohio to become the director of music at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. McMurrin later became the director of music at Highland Park Presbyterian Church in Dallas, Texas, and then First Presbyterian Church in Orlando, Florida. In 1992, Roger was invited to Kyiv, Ukraine, by Episcopal priest George McCammon to conduct Ukraine's world-class musicians. McMurrin was honored to premier Handel's *Messiah* on this initial visit, as Ukrainians had never heard the composition; all sacred music had been prohibited for 70 years during Soviet Union communist rule.

Upon returning to the United States, Roger and his wife, Diane, felt God's calling to relocate to Ukraine and they heeded the call. In 1993, he formed KSOC from the best of the seven professional symphonies and 50 professional choirs in Ukraine. Roger and Diane trusted fully in God and depended on Him to provide daily for their family, his musicians, and the poorest among them which they served. KSOC performed a multitude of concerts in Ukraine and made multiple tours to the United States, Canada, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.

The McMurrins established MMK, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, in the U.S. They also founded two churches in Kyiv: Church of the Holy Trinity and St. Paul's Evangelical Church, which continue to serve widows and orphans. God used Roger and Diane as His tool to bring tens of thousands of people to faith in Jesus Christ using the power of sacred musical masterpieces, spiritually reaching individuals with the gospel in their native language. Thirty years later, what Roger started in Ukraine still endures and continues to inspire and encourage people to find Hope through Jesus Christ.

MMK continues the work and bold legacy pioneered by the McMurrins by expanding support beyond widows and orphans to now include assistance to individuals and families displaced by the war with Russia, conducting national training seminars on spiritually-based trauma healing, and aid to many wounded soldiers and civilians.

In honor of Roger's life and work, the family requests donations be made in his memory to Music Mission Kiev, P.O. Box 161849, Altamonte Springs, Florida 32716, or online at musicmissionkiev.org/give.



Hope for Ukraine Tour

By Greg Kannon, CEO



Perhaps some of us may be lucky enough to have our lives punctuated at least once by an extraordinary experience. The 2023 “Hope for Ukraine Tour”, which spanned from September 14th through October 15th, personified the meaning of the word **extraordinary**. Musical experts from multiple cities in the U.S. where the women’s only tour members of the Kyiv Symphony Orchestra and Chorus (KSOC) performed, proclaimed the concerts to be “the best I had ever heard.” How can we possibly sum up “the best I have ever heard” when these ladies prepared and rehearsed within the dire straits of an ongoing war? Only through the greatness of God...

The beginning of the new Russian-waged war against Ukraine in 2022 threw the make-up of KSOC in a constant phase of new faces. Many, but not all, musicians who had been forced to evacuate their homes earlier in the year returned to Kyiv in late August 2022 to begin preparations for the American tour in 2023. To further complicate matters, male members of KSOC were prohibited from leaving the country because of the war. KSOC’s brilliant conductor, Vika Konchakovska, diligently reworked the music to feature only female voices. A formidable task, but Vika’s chosen repertoire was masterful in every sense.



The touring group was tailored to 28 ladies, the youngest group to have ever toured in America, most for the first time. They traveled over 8,000 miles, through nine different states by bus, performing 16 concerts in 35 days. No matter how grueling or wearisome the travel, at concert time, the ladies' angelic voices were comparative to hearing the heavenly host singing. They executed a level of creativity and performed so flawlessly that the complex arrangements were made to sound simple and effortless.



The “Hope for Ukraine Tour” had a two-fold purpose. The first objective was to sing glorious music about Jesus through sacred classical compositions. The second purpose was to raise prayerful awareness and financial support for the plight of Ukraine. Proceeds from the tour were earmarked to benefit the growing number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), expand spiritual trauma care healing seminars and trainings, and support seven hospitals to help the wounded men and women of Ukraine. As the Holy Spirit moved over each concert, people gave generously. The months of preparations and great expense paid off. Music Mission Kiev was able to send more financial support to Ukraine through the giving of this tour than any other KSOC U.S. tour in recent memory. Thank you to our supporters and praises to God for His grace to make this extraordinary 2023 experience happen at least once in our lifetimes.

Trauma Healing Institute

By Yanina Mospanenko, Communications Specialist

The aggression in the Crimean Peninsula in February and March 2014, whereby Russia invaded and annexed a portion of Ukraine, brought about a massive and disturbing surge of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and victims of post-traumatic stress disorder to those who witnessed the war, including the soldiers who fought in that region. Ukrainians were simply not prepared to attend to mental health issues in such large proportions. With the assistance of the Ukrainian Bible Society, the Trauma Healing Institute was founded to respond to such crying needs.

At that time, Music Mission Kiev (MMK) was already providing care for IDPs from Donbas, but it became alarmingly apparent that not only was there a tremendous need for humanitarian aid, trauma treatment was critically necessary for these war victims. MMK representatives joined forces with the Trauma Healing Institute to learn indispensable skillsets in that specialized medical field. Select MMK staff completed the necessary training and became certified facilitators and group leaders. MMK's trauma team now has access to Trauma Healing Institute training programs and has the knowledge and ability to cross-train other individuals.

Of great significance, MMK's trauma team was recently invited to participate in an all-Ukrainian interdenominational forum, aptly named "From Sprint to Marathon". It was inspirational to see an assembly of delegates from different churches - Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox - come together for the same objective: to learn how to work with and support trauma patients. It was very encouraging to see representation from numerous locations in Ukraine, cities that are close to the war zone, cities that have been de-occupied, and also those cities that are currently under enemy occupation.



The forum's curriculum included an in-depth view of the various Trauma Healing Institute programs. Specialists from diverse fields shared their experiences working with mentally traumatized individuals. Communications from representatives in assorted fields of psychology, individual counseling sessions, and a very informative panel discussion were presented. The Kyiv Symphony Orchestra and Chorus performed several musical pieces that greatly contributed to the overall spiritual healing process.

Prayer time was truly exceptional. Representatives of the different denominations and various cities in Ukraine united as one unit and prayed together, asking for God's strength, restoration, victory, and guidance. What a unique occasion it was for these traumatized individuals to see that they are not alone in their sufferings, to feel compassion and support on their progression back to recovery!

MMK is grateful for its long-term relationship with the Trauma Healing Institute in its ministry efforts to continue to augment treatment skillsets for trauma victims. Witnessing the increased recovery ratios of the stress-related trauma souls MMK cares for has strengthened our desire and commitment to this work.





Christmas Service with Youth

STARA BASAN ORPHANAGE BOARDING SCHOOL

By Vika Rybchynska, Children's Music Club

Vika R. of Music Mission Kiev's (MMK) Children's Music Club and Sasha A., along with four youth ministry members from St. Paul's Church in Kyiv, brought Christmas cheer to the children of the Stara Basan boarding school on Sunday, December 17, 2023. Particularly exciting was that this was the first time that youth members ministered outside of the church setting. Upon arrival, the group's merriment was dampened a bit to see an ambulance at the entrance gate with three sick children waiting for transport. The teacher told them that many children have the flu and some are hospitalized. The MMK well-wishers gave the ailing children gifts and prayed with them for speedy recoveries.

Twenty-eight Stara Basan children attended the holiday gathering and enthusiastically welcomed the MMK visitors with warm hugs. After Vika introduced the children to the visiting youth ministry members, everyone listened to a lovely narrative of "The Christmas Story". Pop questions were asked at the end of the story and sweets were given for correct answers. Youth group members, Dasha and Andriy, kept things lively and conducted several games, along with a musical quiz and contest. Vitalik elaborated about the cajón musical instrument he plays (a box-shaped percussion device). Julia, another youth group member, joined in play and everyone sang Christian songs and Christmas carols together.



At the end of the holiday celebration and much to the children's delights, Christmas gifts of sweets were handed out. Prayers were offered, followed by various questions and discussions. The kids loved the young ministers so much, they did not want them to leave! The ministry team left the children happy and fulfilled.



Numerous youth members at St. Paul's Church have since approached Vika and expressed a desire to also minister to the kids at the boarding school. Heartened by the outing, the group talked and discussed their budding youth ministry on the drive back home. MMK is indeed cultivating the next generation of Christian servants by ministering to such tender young hearts and souls.

Christmas Activities for Widows and Pensioners

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH

By Yanina Mospanenko, Communications Specialist



The Christmas holiday season is mostly associated with various fun activities, food, and presents shared with family and friends. Hosts worry about how to get everything done, what to cook, what gifts to buy. Christmas can be a time of high stress. But amid all this holiday busyness, there are so many elderly people who remain invisible, who live in solitude and are forgotten.

Ministers at Music Mission Kiev (MMK) and St. Paul's Church in Kyiv focus on widows and pensioners through a special program. On every Thursday, about 400 elderly widows and pensioners have the opportunity to come to the large church hall to hear and proclaim God's word. Attendees, at



times, share poems on spiritual and patriotic topics, socialize, and receive food/medicine vouchers.

In the time leading up to Christmas, these gatherings take on a special significance. It is a great opportunity to read and reflect on the Christmas story and its spiritual importance. The vast majority of the widow's program members were born and raised on Soviet propaganda that dictated that there was no God. This spiritually-deprived populace now has the opportunity to hear God's message, to know His truth, to meet Christ and have their hearts transformed.

And, of course, what is Christmas without gifts? MMK's holiday organizers brainstormed about what gifts to buy this past year, but also believed selections should be practical in need. Orthopedic pillows, pillowcases and towels won out. Elena, a widow from Crimea, came up to Pastor Ruslan and expressed her deep appreciation. *"I don't know who came up with the idea to give us orthopedic pillows this year, but I want to say how appropriate it is now. I have serious problems with my neck. I don't have the finances to buy an orthopedic pillow for myself. And now I will sleep on this one and it will relieve my pain. I am very glad that this is not some kind of a kettle or something else, but something that is aimed at improving our health. God is taking care of our spiritual, mental and physical health through you."* How enjoyable it was to watch them rejoice with appreciation like children again in their advanced ages.

It is also understandable that in such desperate times, some come at first to these meetings for humanitarian assistance. But the Holy Spirit eventually touches their hearts and they become believers of Christ's great love and mercy. They share camaraderie and create nurturing bonds of fellowship. Many have difficult situations and meet people with similar difficulties that help them cope. Through MMK, God's care, His light and warmth provide renewed hope to the seemingly abandoned who have suffered so much.



The Mystery of Christmas Concert

By Yanina Mospanenko, Communications Specialist



І здалося: ти сягнув небес, схопив там
зірку й далі в вись;
Ти бажаєш миру на землі; настане час,
прийде він колись.
Друзі та сім'я всі разом,
сповнені любові та добра.
Ми щасливі, бо прийшло Різдво,
найкраща для всіх пора.
Різдвяна чарівна пора.

On Tuesday, December 26, 2023, the Kyiv Symphony Orchestra and Choir (KSOC) presented a glorious Christmas program at Central Baptist Church in Kyiv, entitled “The Mystery of Christmas.”

Christmas in Ukraine is celebrated on December 25th and since 2017, the date has been one of the country’s official state holidays. Prior to that, Christmas was celebrated by many on January 7th by the Julian calendar. The Soviet government did everything to destroy references to Christmas and shifted the emphasis to celebrating the New Year. Due to the effect of Russian power, the traditions of celebrating Christmas and New Year have become blurred in their meaning and purpose. To some in Ukraine, the New Year’s celebration remains the most significant holiday.

In the 1990s, KSOC founder, Roger McMurrin, established a tradition of introducing and performing select Christmas carols and songs from all over the world. One singer, who has been a part of the choir since its inception, said, “*We had an incredible opportunity to learn, perform, and thus familiarize the audience with a wide variety of Christmas-themed repertoire.*” KSOC’s Christmas concert tradition remains unchanged for 30 years.

When KSOC Conductor Vika Konchakovska began creating “The Mystery of Christmas” program, *Magnificat* by English composer John Rutter caught her attention. Vika wrote a personal letter to John Rutter asking how KSOC could purchase sheet music to perform his work at the Christmas concert in Ukraine. In response, John Rutter wrote that he would allow KSOC to perform his work free of charge. He did not explain the reasons for this generosity; he only wrote that he was donating the sheet music and would be very happy if his work was performed in Ukraine. KSOC is very grateful to John Rutter for his generous Christmas gift! The participation of the youth worship group at St. Paul’s Church, under the musical leadership of Victoria Rybchynska, complemented the overall Christmas program.

The large hall at Central Baptist Church was filled to capacity with people of all ages and religious affiliations. Everyone was mesmerized by the singing and music. People closed their eyes and felt peace, joy, and exhilaration. The Holy Spirit was working in the hearts of the audience, transmitting His great love through the magical healing powers of music. The pastor of Central Baptist Church expressed his sentiments perfectly – “*I was able to see Christ in this Christmas concert and it was indeed about the mystery that attracts and draws to the desire to understand its essence.*”



Christmas Gatherings for IDPs

By Yanina Mospanenko, Communications Specialist

Music Mission Kiev (MMK) launched an IDP Program in 2023. MMK employees and members of St. Paul's Church in Kyiv meet with families, men, women and children, every second Saturday morning of the month before worship service. The adults enjoy Bible study, and the children are treated to a special program which includes Bible stories, crafts and songs. At the end of the meeting, MMK distributes food/medicine vouchers to these destitute individuals.

At our last gathering, the story of the birth of Jesus was narrated, along with lighting of Advent candles. The symbolic meaning of each of the candles resonated in every hurting and suffering heart present – faith, hope, peace, repentance, love. With each new candle lit, wishes were expressed and hearts were warmed and inspired. The last candle, symbolizing the love of Christ, was given to light at home in unified family prayer for peace.

It was a touching celebratory gathering. People felt the warmth of God's touch on their wounded souls. Some found relief, some cried, others rejoiced that they were not alone in their predicaments. Many approached us after the service, thanking us for making them feel at home. It was evident that God was speaking to everyone through His people about His love and a future in His care.

A special Christmas observance was also held in the city of Dnipro. The pastor of Nadiya Church said that the church organized a large Christmas service in which IDPs were invited. Transportation was provided for those who could not come on their own, allowing everyone the opportunity to celebrate Christmas with church family. The story of the birth of Jesus and its significance were shared. Prayers were offered for everyone's needs, thanking God for His care. The celebration ended with a feast prepared by members of Hope Church. Presents of MMK food/medicine vouchers were given.

For those in the IDP Program who were unable to attend, church ministers visited them personally, either at home or in the hospital. Everyone had the opportunity to hear about the love of Christ, His birth and His enduring hope for us.

Christmas Greetings for Ukrainian Defenders in Hospital

By Yanina Mospanenko, Communications Specialist

“...Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?...” – Matthew 25:37-39



My friend Olha’s husband has an amazing talent for compassion. As a musician and violinist who played many years in an orchestra under the direction of Roger McMurrin, founder of Kyiv Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, he proposed organizing a small Christmas concert for the convalescing soldiers of the war. Vika R. of Music Mission Kiev’s (MMK) Children’s Music Club joined efforts with a youth worship group. Pastor Ruslan of St. Paul’s Church lead prayer worship.

The event was well attended; the concert hall was filled with classical music, Christmas songs and carols. Words of gratitude, spiritual guidance and prayers were said. The youth worship group, attended by Pastor Ruslan, were also allowed to go to hospital rooms and sing Christmas songs to those who were not ambulatory. What a special experience for the youth to see their defenders, pray with them, and share words of personal gratitude for their heroism in protecting Ukraine. Each soldier was given a parting Christmas gift provided by MMK. It was a joyous and uplifting Christmas celebration to honor and remember Ukraine’s war heroes!

Touching the Lives of Wounded Men and Women

By Olga Alekseeva, Bookkeeper & Trained Massage Therapist

I look at the people we nurse in the hospital and wonder how the human body and soul can cope with the horrors of war. The physical and psychological pain is difficult to grasp.

Victor has deep abdominal bruising and has difficulty breathing from his injuries, but is determined to go back to war defending his country. Andrew has a severe injury to one hand; regaining the function of that hand is crucial if he is to continue his occupation as a DJ. Peter is dealing with a contusion and recovering from shell shock. Maxim suffered multiple injuries from artillery fire. He collects drones, repairs them, and sends them back to the front during his recovery.

Angels come in many forms. Music Mission Kiev (MMK) is very involved in helping us meet the physical and emotional needs of our patients at numerous hospitals. Ira Donchenko organized a group of older women who knit warm socks for the wounded soldiers. Dr. Nastya and Dr. Inna, in their separate medical fields, are God-sent. Pam Dandre, a ministry partner and former nurse, visited wounded soldiers one evening. They spent 1.5 therapeutic hours recounting personal war experiences while sharing homemade cookies.

Rehabilitation and continued recovery efforts in so many areas are a part of Ukraine's future. I pray for God's blessings and am grateful for MMK's abundant benevolence in helping us meet overwhelming challenges.

Pam Dandre





Dr. Nastya and Dr. Inna

Faith Over Fatigue

By Greg Kannon, CEO

The insightful stories imparted in the Gazette are intended to give snapshots of the amazing work God allows Music Mission Kiev (MMK) to do in Ukraine. I often do not provide updates on the intensity and ugliness of the war because it is news anyone can find online. We choose to publicize the positive, but by doing so, it does not minimize or reduce the gruesome news in anyway regarding the extreme danger converged on innocent lives each day for more than 700 days and counting.

Counterinsurgency expert John Nagl, a former lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army who is now a professor of war-fighting studies in the U.S. Army War College, wrote an article in the *Intelligencer* on December 4, 2023. He broached the uneasy question of whether the West is going to support Ukraine in the defense of democracy and freedom against unjust aggression and in favor of international law's most basic principles?

Various European news sites are beginning to report the growing fatigue Europeans are feeling about the war in Ukraine. Undoubtedly the current conflict in Israel adds to the weariness. If this objectionable attitude leads to reduced and capped military and financial support from the West, Ukraine is at risk of losing its freedom and independence once more at the hands of the Russians. Decision makers must pay heed; the end result could cost the loss of countless more lives.

The flip side of this blatant supposition is Ukraine is victorious! Imagine the immense opportunities in helping heal and restore the people and homelands of Ukraine. We must pray for wisdom and discernment. The rebuilding of Ukraine will require decades of possibilities to respond to the people we love and serve in this wonderful country.

Ephesians 6:12 challenges us,

"...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

Our part is to be the righteous people of God crying out for mercy and grace to bring an end to this brutality.

Let us remember that our faith is increased through the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit at work within us. Not only do we have the natural power of logic in dealing with agonizing situations, we also have the encouragement of the Holy Spirit through faith to help us overcome any feelings of fatigue or discouragement. I take a lot of comfort from that knowledge, and I hope you will too. God Bless Ukraine.





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