

SPRING | SUMMER 2022 MTW.ORG

# network

*Light Shines  
in the Darkness*

**mtw**  
Mission to the World



# Light Shines in the Darkness in Ukraine

Christian Love and Hospitality on Display in the Face of Evil

BY: ANDREW HESS

A church in Romania welcomed a convoy of Ukrainian refugees with a warm meal.

In the days and weeks leading up to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, MTW missionaries across Ukraine and neighboring countries were busy preparing for refugees they anticipated from the eastern parts of the country—where the initial invasion was first expected.

Missionaries, pastors, and church members all gathered food, clothing, hygiene supplies, and medicine in anticipation of what they hoped and prayed would not happen. Many churches even began to clear out their basements so they would be ready to be used as makeshift bomb shelters if needed.

## WAR IN THE CITY

In the capital city of Kyiv, Ukraine, many expected the invasion would start in the cities further east as it had when Russia invaded in 2014. Fedya,\* pastor of an MTW partner church and staff member at Evangelical Reformed Seminary of Ukraine in Kyiv, said, “We were preparing to accept refugees from the east. We were buying groceries, water, hygiene supplies.” But on the morning of February 24, things took a turn for the worse. It was the first day of the Russian army’s attack—on Kyiv.

Fedya described hearing unidentifiable sounds early in the morning. He prayed, “Lord, no, please not the missiles.” But the sounds he described as a “series of loud thumps” were in fact the sounds of the full-scale invasion of Kyiv by the Russian army.

As the bombs began falling on the city, Fedya said, “My first thought was, ‘Should I stay in my apartment? Or should I go urge people to go into the bomb shelters?’” He continued, “This was so unexpected; many of the bomb shelters weren’t even ready yet,” as many citizens in Kyiv didn’t believe the Russians would initially attack that far west.

In those early hours, Fedya decided to go outside and encourage people to seek safety. He said, “It was surreal. People were walking their dogs. No one knew what the explosions were.” Fedya estimated that up to 95% of the citizens in Kyiv were initially confused about what was happening because there wasn’t any information available. He remembered people calling out from their windows, “What is that sound?” and many of them refusing to believe it was the sound of war advancing on their city.

\*Last name omitted for security reasons.

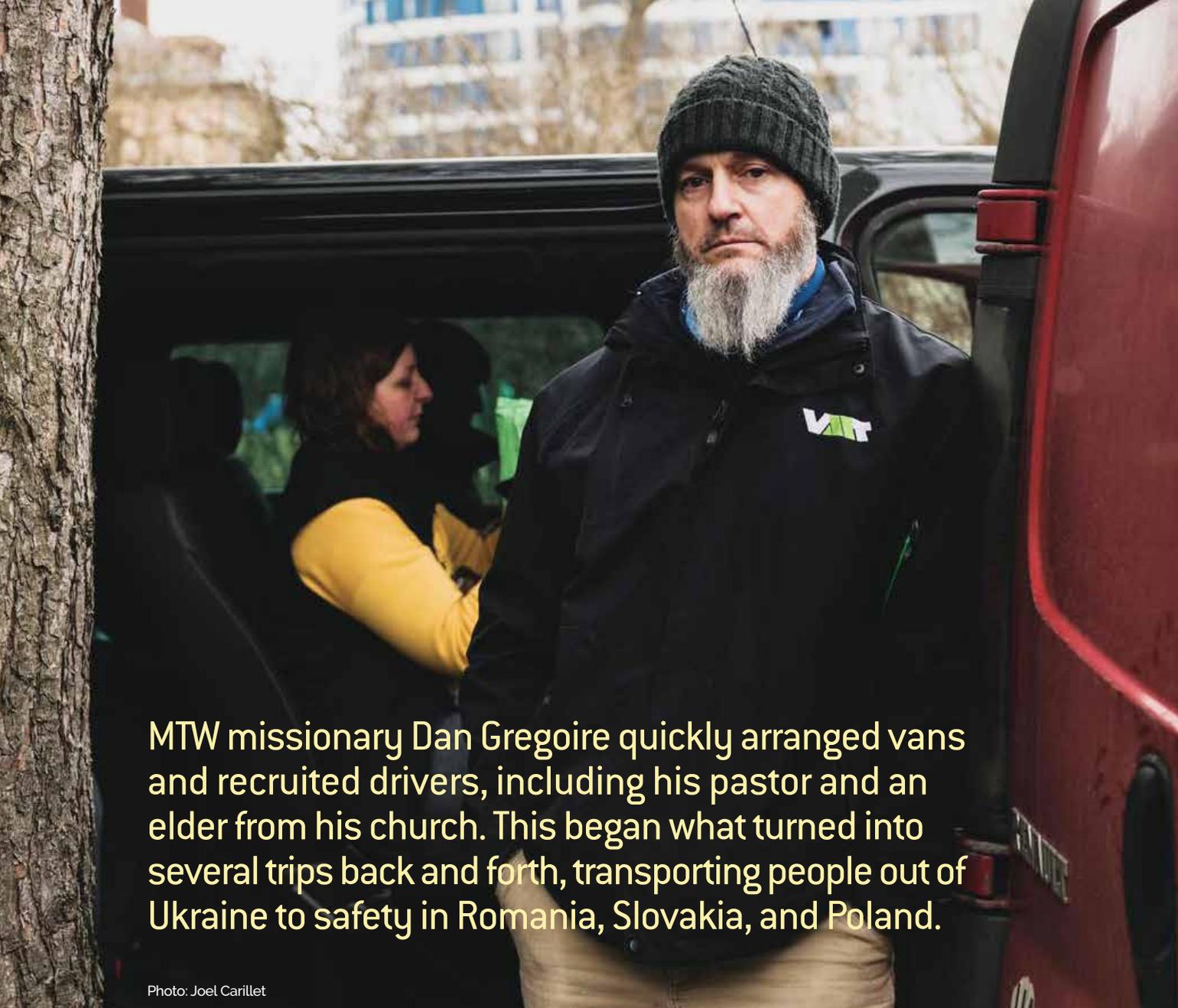
Jon Eide, MTW Ukraine’s country director who has served in Ukraine for 20 years, shared, “Someone has described this war as Ukraine’s version of the 9/11 attack on the United States. I’d add that it’s more like a daily 9/11 for Ukrainians.”

Across Ukraine, citizens were faced with a decision they didn’t have much time to make. They could stay in the city and seek safety in basements and bomb shelters, or they could attempt to travel west to cities like Lviv. Fedya explained, “Psychologically, most people felt safer in their basements than going outside. When the bombs are falling, the idea of traveling is scary and risky, even if that is the safest decision long-term.”



A family in the Kyiv church shares a meal with evacuees. They were later forced to evacuate as well (though the father had to remain).

Many, including Fedya, who had already experienced and fled from the initial Russian invasion into Ukraine in 2014, decided to leave the city. Other in Fedya’s church also decided it was best to flee the city. They began to call people in their church, encouraging them to leave. Some left and some decided to stay. Within days, the opportunity to leave was no longer an option as it became too dangerous to travel. >>



**MTW missionary Dan Gregoire quickly arranged vans and recruited drivers, including his pastor and an elder from his church. This began what turned into several trips back and forth, transporting people out of Ukraine to safety in Romania, Slovakia, and Poland.**

Photo: Joel Carillet

### EXTRAORDINARY HOSPITALITY

For those who left, traveling brought unanticipated challenges. Fedya explained, “We had to change our route several times because of ruined infrastructure.” At one point, they came upon a bridge the Russians had destroyed and had to find another way. Another time, Fedya said, “We had to switch routes because of danger from air raids. We traveled for three days before arriving in Uzhhorod located close to the Slovakian border.”

The first night of their journey, Fedya drove through the night to get to safety. They arrived in Ternopil on the second night and stayed in one of the churches taking in refugees. Several

churches in Ternopil had prepared food and mattresses for refugees and even provided showers for the weary travelers. Fedya said, “The churches in Ternopil were packed with people.” He remembered their generous hospitality. “There were so many people united and ready to help refugees and whoever needed help. The people of Ukraine are more united because of their great sufferings. The churches in Ternopil were ready to show people the real hope that we have in Christ.” As of this writing, Fedya and his family are staying in Ternopil for now as he wrestles with whether or not to send his wife and children across the border to greater safety.

### BORDER COUNTRIES STEP IN TO HELP

Approximately 900 kilometers away in Spišská Nová Ves, Slovakia, MTW missionary Dan Gregoire lives with his wife, Rebecca, and eight children. Dan was praying about ways he could help serve those displaced by this war. He got a call from Doug Shepherd, MTW missionary serving in Lviv, Ukraine, who said they had a convoy of six vehicles transporting families with children to the Romanian border to the south.

Doug asked Dan to secure three vans and drivers for them to help transport women and children in vehicles driven by Ukrainian men. The men would not be able to cross the border due to a mandate that Ukrainian men aged 18 to 60 remain in the country, so those they were transporting would have to walk across the border and have other transportation on the other side. Dan quickly arranged vans and recruited drivers, including his pastor and an elder from his church. This began what turned into several trips back and forth, transporting people out of Ukraine to safety in Romania, Slovakia, and Poland.

Dan was overwhelmed by the hospitality of a church in Ardud, Romania. Dan said, “Our convoy arrived and there were three large tables in a hospitality room, set up with cooked chicken, potatoes, salads, and drinks, all prepared and ready for us when we arrived.” He continued, “They were so hospitable and loving to receive their brothers and sisters from Ukraine. They arranged housing, beds, and showers for everyone.” The next morning, the church hosted the group for breakfast before they continued their journey. Dan remembered, “During breakfast, the mayor of the town came and welcomed us. The mayor said he was happy to meet us but wished it was under different circumstances.”

Dan and the convoy made their way to a small, remote Hungarian/Romanian border crossing and were able to cross in 20 minutes.

The churches and believers in Ukraine and neighboring countries were ready to show extraordinary hospitality to others when the darkness of war fell upon them. Many have continued sacrificing, giving of themselves, as this war has continued. Dan shared that his family had over 20 people in their home in Slovakia at one point. And when asked what it was like for their family, he said, “Hospitality is our sweet spot. A huge focus of our ongoing ministry is hospitality.”



MTW Slovakia missionary Dan Gregoire (top right) organized a convoy of vans to evacuate Ukrainians.

### THE GIFT OF PRAYER

Many Christians around the world have also shown hospitality by graciously giving and praying in support of the work being done. Millions of dollars have been raised and MTW missionaries are grateful for the opportunity to show the love of Christ by meeting the many needs that seem to be increasing by the hour; and they are anticipating that needs will be great as churches are rebuilt in Ukraine or replanted elsewhere.

In addition to financial gifts, many are asking for the gift of prayer. Fedya said, “I want to encourage people to not stop praying. We know the Lord hears and answers. He is sovereign over all that happens. We share about Christ the Lord. He gave us this command to pray. We ask you to pray that this outrageous evil would stop.” Fedya’s church, which is now scattered, gathers every morning online to encourage one other and pray together.

As Ukrainian Christians continue to remind each of the light of Christ in these dark times, may Christians around the world continue to gather around them, giving and interceding for them, with persevering prayer as long the need exists. [📖](#)

For more information on how you can give and pray and to read recent updates visit [mtw.org/ukraine-crisis](http://mtw.org/ukraine-crisis).

# SHAKEN AGAIN

Compassion Fund Eases Suffering in Beleaguered Haiti

BY: BEN WILKERSON

Wednesday, August 14, 2021, dawned like any other day in Petit-Trou-de-Nippes on the island nation of Haiti. As the sun rose over the horizon, people went about their normal lives as on any day—fishing, getting their wares ready to sell in the market. But at 8:09 a.m. the villages and towns of the district were hit by a 7.2 magnitude earthquake that devastated the southern portion of the island.

Roads split and caved and buildings crumbled as the earthquake and its aftershocks blasted across the entire peninsula. Days were spent searching through the rubble of broken homes, churches, stores, and countless buildings—the damage was overwhelming. More than 137,500 homes and other buildings were destroyed and over 2,200 people lost their lives. More than 12,000 were injured. Though the earthquake occurred last August, Haitians are still reeling from the destruction of the earthquake and other factors which have made Haiti the epicenter of one of the world's greatest humanitarian crises.

Money given as a result of generous donations to MTW's Compassion Fund have helped ease the suffering.

## REBUILDING HOMES, RESTORING NORMALCY

Esaie Etienne, native Haitian and MTW missionary to Haiti, has helped bring food and building supplies to the region most impacted by earthquake. During one of his trips, Esaie bumped into the pastor of a small Baptist church in the little town of Casse who was having a difficult time. "In September, I saw how he was living, and I said to myself that we have to do something for him. ... In December I was able to initiate the construction of a three-room house for his family and him. The construction is going on right now and will probably be finished this spring. The pastor was so thankful and excited because he did not have any means to reconstruct his house any time soon." Two hours away in Cavallion, Esaie distributed building materials to seven other families, enabling them to rebuild their homes.

Esaie also has a personal reason to return to that area of Haiti. His wife, Natacha, has extended family in the area that were also without homes and Compassion funds were able to help some of them as well. In addition to providing material comfort

to those who are suffering, Esaie and his wife were able to counsel those affected by the earthquake and offer the hope found only in Christ.

When he's not orchestrating relief efforts among communities in the southern portion of Haiti, Esaie's ministry is based in Gonaives in northern Haiti. His role involves training pastors, planting churches, and overseeing a Christian school for local children. Esaie and the pastors he's trained have planted three Reformed churches, with another slated for this year.

## THE GREATEST NEED IS PRAYER

The need for resources to rebuild homes and help families in dire need is tremendous, but gifts to MTW's Compassion Fund have helped ease the burden. The greatest need, though, is for prayer. Esaie expressed the huge importance of prayer for Haiti. "We are at a point, not only with the natural disasters like earthquakes and hurricanes, but now we have these man-made disasters like these kidnappings, insecurity, which really preclude people from moving around. Just to go to the supermarket, people are afraid. Just please emphasize prayer for the country, for peace." [📖](#)

Please pray through the needs expressed here, and for peace and stability throughout Haiti.

## Dangerous Streets and Starving Farmers Characterize Haiti

Once known for beautiful Caribbean beaches and impressive tropical mountains, Haiti is home to over 11.4 million people in a space smaller than the state of Maryland. Because of its unique geography, the roads to the southern portion of the island are bottlenecked at the capital, Port-au-Prince. The situation, even before the earthquake, is as dangerous as some of the conditions one might find in Afghanistan today. On July 7, 2021, a few weeks before the earthquake, President Jovenel Moise was assassinated by foreign mercenaries. The situation brought terrible political upheaval which is still present today. To make matters worse, Haiti has some of the worst gang-related violence on the planet. Kidnappings and murders are regular occurrences now, and gangs have control of the roads that lead from Port-au-Prince to the southern portion of the country. This makes any sort of humanitarian aid nearly impossible as looting humanitarian convoys is commonplace.

To make matters even worse, Tropical Storm Grace hit the same area affected by the earthquake just three days later. The subsequent heavy rains and flooding severely impacted the lives of nearly 800,000 Haitians. The combined impact of the quake and the storm devastated wells and cisterns in the surrounding area and caused massive landslides which wiped out Haitians' subsistence farms. Many are starving and do not have the means to replant their small crops to feed themselves. Haiti is ranked near the bottom of countries in terms of food insecurity as many do not have jobs to feed their families. Even now, months later, the southern portion of Haiti is still reeling from the devastation caused by both water and earthquake and there seems to be little end in sight. *Haiti desperately needs our prayers.*



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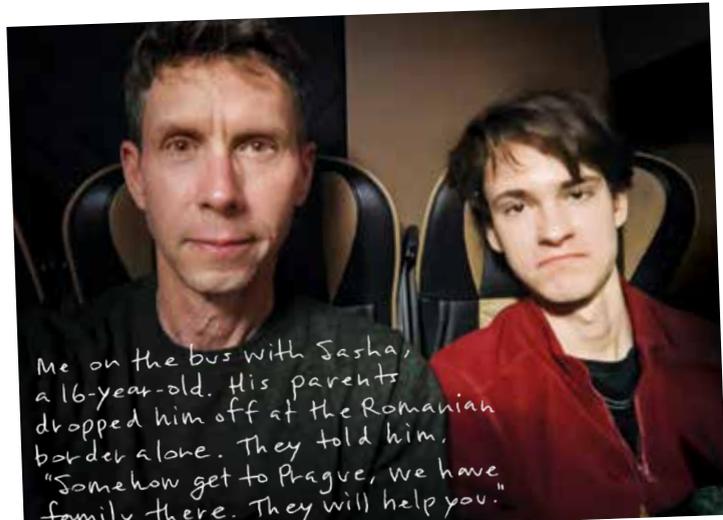


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Me on the bus with Sasha, a 16-year-old. His parents dropped him off at the Romanian border alone. They told him, "Somehow get to Prague, we have family there. They will help you."



My family had left Ukraine before me. While traveling, I took pictures of this doll, (representing my family), in front of signs along my route to reunite with them.



Igor stands by his car. It struggled to get him, his wife, four children, two dogs all the way from Odesa to Brasov. He's hoping the car will make it to Germany.



A Red Cross tent with first aid and food for people crossing the border from Moldova to Romania

My wife, Andrea, and teammate Lauren Stovall help distribute basic necessities.



# FLEEING UKRAINE IN PHOTOS

Captured by Bob Burham  
MTW MISSIONARY, ODESA, UKRAINE



Maria, one of the girls I helped leave Odesa, packed a small bag, but included two thick Dostoevsky hardbacks. It's how Ukrainians evacuate.



On the ferry, crossing into Romania



Beds ready at the refugee center in Brasov



People waiting at the evacuation center in Brasov, Romania, for basic supplies



After traveling three days these women settled into a home and had a home cooked meal.



Ukrainians worshipping Sunday morning in Brasov, listening to a sermon recorded by their pastor, who is still in Odesa

BY: ANDREW HESS

# THE STAKES ARE HIGH for Ukrainian Christians Praying for Peace

In the weeks since war in Ukraine escalated in February, MTW missionaries across Eastern Europe have prioritized the traumatized refugees who have come to them weighed down by physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

During interviews, several experienced missionaries have broken down, spontaneously wept, and showed how the huge needs are weighing on them. The war's psychological carnage on the hearts of the people they are serving is devastating. As one missionary said apologetically through tears, "I'm sorry. I haven't had time to process all this."

## PROTECT THE PEOPLE, BURN THE EVIDENCE

In rare moments when they do have time to themselves, these ministry leaders are thinking about how to continue to shepherd and protect the people of God who are walking through deep pain and suffering. Doug Shepherd, MTW missionary serving in Lviv, Ukraine, described some of the surreal steps pastors are taking to protect their people: "Some pastors who've stayed behind in eastern Ukraine are destroying church documents and member lists to prevent them from falling into the wrong hands and being used to harm the believers listed."



Alister Torrens, the president of Evangelical Reformed Seminary of Ukraine located in Kyiv, said he instructed staff members to paint over the name of their seminary so it wouldn't be targeted by the Russians. Alister's wife, Sarah, explained, "Ukraine has enjoyed unique religious freedom. Ukraine is commonly referred to as the Bible belt of Eastern Europe." She continued, "Many missionaries over the years haven't been able to minister in Russia the way we are free to in Ukraine."

For those who've dedicated their lives to advance the cause of Christ in Ukraine, the stakes couldn't be higher. Jon Eide, MTW Ukraine's country director who has served in Ukraine

**"Churches and seminaries may close. This could drive the Church out or underground. Ukraine is the most religiously free country in Eastern Europe right now."**

for 20 years, shared what many fear could happen if Russia takes authority over Ukraine: "Churches and seminaries may close. This could drive the Church out or underground. Ukraine is the most religiously free country in Eastern Europe right now." >>



STOCK PHOTO

“When Russia invaded eastern regions in 2014, some pastors were abducted and tortured. Other believers were kidnapped and murdered. The violence against Christians was extreme.”

### ANTICIPATING RUSSIAN PERSECUTION

Alister and Sarah said, “All that we have built [referring to the seminary and churches planted by alumni] has the potential to be destroyed. We might not be allowed back in the country, let alone be allowed to continue in ministry.”

Russia is far more religiously restricted, as Alister explained: “By Russian law, people don’t have the right to share the gospel with friends or relatives in their own home. They are only allowed to share the gospel in registered churches. The rules are very strict.” It is these strict rules that many fear will be enforced in Ukraine if Russia’s plans succeed.

Jon said, “This is a geopolitical crisis and we know it has implications for the United States. But besides these implications, we must remember these are our brothers and sisters in Christ. It’s imperative that we recognize and empathize with them. They are looking at the prospect of

losing their freedom to worship.” He continued, “This war could restrict access of the gospel to the rest of Eastern Europe for a generation.”

In addition to the loss of the freedom to worship, there is also a threat of persecution. Alister explained, “When Russia invaded eastern regions in 2014, some pastors were abducted and tortured. Other believers were kidnapped and murdered. The violence against Christians was extreme.” This is the very real threat Ukrainian Christians are living under as the Russian attacks continue.

### UNSHAKABLE HOPE AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE CHURCH

Despite this grim threat, hope is not lost. As Alister said, “On the other hand, I’m hopeful that Putin has overreached.” As of this writing he noted, “We are seeing news that Ukraine is going to have the victory. We remain hopeful and prayerful that Ukraine will stave off the Russian attack.”

Jon also has observed a strong hope in many people. “The Ukrainians I talk to don’t feel like this is going to end soon, but they have a beautiful hope for their country and their freedom,” he said. “They are choosing to have a long-term outlook, not a short-term one. In the end, their hope is in the eternal kingdom of Christ.”

While the war has caused some ministry to pause, missionaries and Ukrainian believers have found other ways to meet needs in the name of Christ. Alister explained that his seminary staff and students have scattered all over Eastern Europe but have stayed connected and have been able to meet the needs of others. When seminary leadership learned that businesses and shops were still accepting debit cards, they began to provide emergency funds, some of which came from MTW, to meet needs. He explained, “We learned that many believers didn’t have any money left to buy anything. Much work and access to salaries ceased.” So, through the seminary, they wired money onto people’s debit cards. Alister shared several stories where the seminary wired money to staff and students who were then able to share those funds with many others who had need.

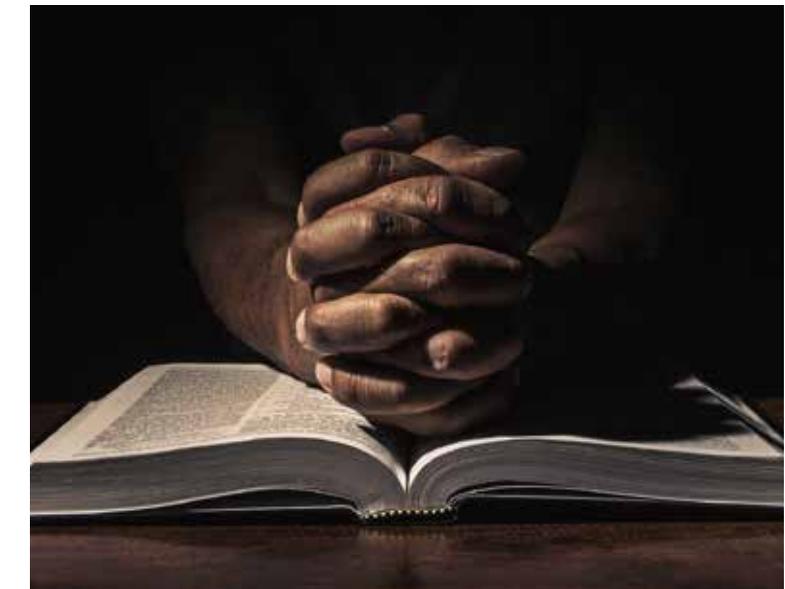
Many missionaries have noted how these hard circumstances have created unique opportunities. Jon mentioned several new church-planting opportunities in the places where Ukrainians have fled to. He explained, “When you’ve lost assurances in what you always assumed was true, it is a time when the gospel often becomes the most attractive.”

Alister has observed the same phenomena. “People are more open to praying. People who wouldn’t normally pray now want to pray,” he said. He has heard stories of many pastors who have had opportunities to share the gospel and pray with people in bomb shelters, people who wouldn’t normally attend church.

Fedya,\* a pastor and staff member at the seminary, said, “As we continue to gather as a church, we remind each other of the hope we have in the gospel and in Jesus Christ, who conquered death. We know that even if we don’t survive this war, we will be raised by Christ. And we need to share this. This is the truth the world needs right now.”

### WATCH AND PRAY

In Matthew 26:38–45, Jesus asked His disciples to watch and pray with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane during His own time of sorrow and trouble. Sadly, our Lord soon found them sleeping and asked, “So, could you not watch with me one hour?”



Many Christians in Ukraine share this sentiment of Christ. They find themselves asking a similar question: “Who is still watching and praying with us?” As they face the threat of a difficult future, they remain persistent in prayer, pleading with their brothers and sisters around the world to continue praying fervently with and for them. They see firsthand how high the stakes are for the body of Christ in Eastern Europe. And yet, they remain hopeful, believing that God will glorify Himself through their lives and continue to build His Church, even in a time of war. [n](#)

For more information on how you can give and pray and to read recent updates visit [mtw.org/ukraine-crisis](https://mtw.org/ukraine-crisis).

*\*Last name omitted for security reasons.*

# COME AND SEE



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# photo feature

10.03 г. Черноморск. Спасибо огромное!  
Вы лучшие! ❤️

Дякую / СПАСИБО  
Thank you / Mulțumesc  
to all of Romania

from our big family

Thank you!

14.03 Odessa  
Огромное спасибо!  
Ваша Труда, помощь и забота очень помогают понять, что жизнь продолжается!

И еще есть надежда! И есть в этом мире добро!

11.03. Thank You!

We are from Mariupol.  
We felt some peace here and could fall asleep.  
This is what we haven't felt for a long time.  
God bless you!

10.03.2022. Огромное  
спасибо за Вашу доброту,  
отзывчивость к нуждам беде!!!  
С любовью Анастасия.

Thank you notes left by Ukrainians for the Romanian Christians who hosted them during their evacuation. Credit: Bob Burnham, MTW missionary to Odesa, Ukraine

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FROM THE COORDINATOR

# In the Midst of the Suffering

At the time of this writing, over 3 million people have fled Ukraine and almost 2 million are internally displaced within. Most of these are women and children. Can you imagine how the children are processing these experiences?

I am reminded of stories my parents would tell me when they fled the encroaching North Korean army coming through Seoul in the early 1950s. They were just children at the time. My dad remembers being about 9 years old carrying a large sack of rice on his back: walking, crying, confused, and afraid. When my father saw pictures of Ukrainian kids crying as they were evacuating their cities, he saw himself. Can you imagine the effect this will have on a whole generation of Ukrainian children? Their parents? The nation?

*And yet in all this horror, we see Jesus. He is present in the midst of the suffering.* We see Jesus walking alongside crying children, comforting them, wiping away their tears. We see Jesus ministering to His flock still living in Ukraine in bombed-out cities, encouraging them with His Word, and praying over them. We see Jesus in the refugee camps, feeding

those who are hungry, clothing those who are cold, sheltering those who are homeless. Jesus is in the midst of all the suffering bringing hope, comfort, and His presence.

*How is He there? He is there through His Holy Spirit working through His saints, the Church.* He is there in believing parents who are comforting their children. He is there in Ukrainian pastors who have stayed to minister to their remaining flock. He is there in Polish, Romanian, and other believers and missionaries who are serving the countless refugees pouring into their countries. Jesus is there in the midst of this suffering, proclaiming His gospel in both word and deed. And Jesus, by His Spirit, is also providing for the needs of those suffering through you, the Church, through your prayers and giving. This is the Church at its best. The light of Christ shines most brightly in the midst of darkness.

We give thanks to God for you and your partnership in the gospel. Your prayers and giving are mobilizing an army of God's people to respond to this tragedy with gospel love, grace, and kindness. May God continue to demonstrate His presence and power through His saints, the Church! [▶](#)



Dr. Lloyd Kim



LIGHT SHINES IN DARKNESS



SHAKEN AGAIN: COMPASSION FUNDS FOR HAITI



FLEEING UKRAINE: IN PHOTOS



THE STAKES ARE HIGH

