



BAPTIST INTERNATIONAL *Challenger*

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Emergency Aid for Ukraine — Please Help!

Dear friends,

In all of BIEM's history, we have never faced a crisis so enormous. At a time of year when we're normally planning laughter-filled children's camps, our Ukrainian personnel suddenly found themselves in a genuine war zone. The destruction dished out by Russian rifles, tanks, rockets, aircraft, and missiles is devastating. Masses of citizens have fled their homes in fear for their lives.

But let me emphasize that BIEM has planted churches in multiple regions of Ukraine. Some of those churches are suddenly in strategic locations to shine for Christ! By God's grace, and with your financial gifts to BIEM's **Ukrainian War Relief** fund, these missionaries and their congregations glorify God by reaching out to the refugees with spiritual and physical help. At the time of this writing, we have successfully wired a total of \$150,000 to our churches ministering to refugees in the name of Christ. More funds are needed, for the need is huge, but our God is even greater. We pray that many of you will heed His prompting to help.



By targeting Ukrainian homes and apartments, Russian artillery immediately created floods of homeless refugees.

Newly homeless individuals and families come to our churches with a variety of needs. Here's how BIEM's missionaries are serving them with the support you provide:

1. Providing food and shelter to those seeking refuge.
2. Supplying blankets, clothes, soap, toothpaste, and toothbrushes.
3. Providing medicine to those in need.
4. Counseling and praying with those needing help and encouragement.
5. Sharing the Gospel one-on-one and in groups.
6. Evacuating people in dangerous places to safer locations.
7. Assisting refugees to reach and cross the Ukrainian border into Poland.

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When bombs began falling, one church converted their unfinished basement into a bomb shelter for members and neighbors.



Although still under construction, this village church constructed of heavy blocks became a refuge for the neighborhood.

Rescue Mission to Chernihiv

In war-torn Ukraine, with God's help, BIEM's Pastor Lyosha succeeded in delivering his family and others safely to the Polish border. But then he drove cross-country back to Chernihiv in the war zone to rescue others. We asked him to describe that experience but without names for the sake of caution.

Once heard a story about a man who visited the oceanside after a storm. Stranded starfish littered the beach. He strode to the water's edge and began throwing starfish back into the ocean. Another man stopped to watch then said, "You're wasting your time. There are thousands of starfish here. You can't help them all." The first man picked up yet another and tossed it into the water. "Throwing one starfish into the ocean might mean nothing for those thousands, but it meant everything to that one."

When I left my city of Chernihiv on February 24 [the day Russia invaded



Pastor Lyosha used to run in this stadium for fitness. Now no one does.

Ukraine], my only regret was that my car seats only seven people. That day it carried nine (three were children), as I left behind all my clothes. Among those riding with us was a young woman from our church. She was pregnant and nearly ready to deliver.

I dropped off my wife and kids and most of these others at the Polish border. [By law, able-bodied Ukrainian men are not allowed out of the country.] The pregnant woman delivered in a hospital right before the border on the Ukrainian side. I stayed and helped her and her husband to go through the border to Poland with their baby.

I settled in western Ukraine for a week, resting after all the stress of the four-day drive to the border. However, I was concerned for other church friends—they were still stranded in the city under siege. Hearing news of a slight lull in the fighting, I decided to not lose time and drove all the way back to Chernihiv. Driving east took me less than 24 hours to return.

I entered the city to the sound of constant explosions from tank battles. Smoke rose from destroyed houses and burned vehicles. The sights, sounds, and smells of war became very real. For a moment, I wondered whether coming had been a colossal mistake. After all, I'd already been safe, far from these battles. But I had a worthy goal and knew many people were praying for me, which was encouraging.

Even as I drove into the city, I realized getting back out wouldn't be quick or simple. A huge number of vehicles stood in line, each waiting for a chance to exit. Ukrainian soldiers weren't permitting them to leave because of battles raging



A private home in Chernihiv, reduced to rubble.



Here's a peek into the library.

outside the city. Normally, two bridges over the Desna River offered ways out of the city. However, one bridge was already destroyed; the second showed serious damage. A gaping hole was in the middle of the bridge, probably from a bomb.

I gathered the waiting friends (from two families) in my apartment, which is near the remaining bridge. We planned to spend the night there and then leave early the next morning. Because the heating didn't work, my apartment was frigid. I tried to be hospitable and even cooked dinner for all of us. However, that night was terrifying. My apartment building is near the edge of the city, which was a

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"Reaching the world for Christ since 1981"

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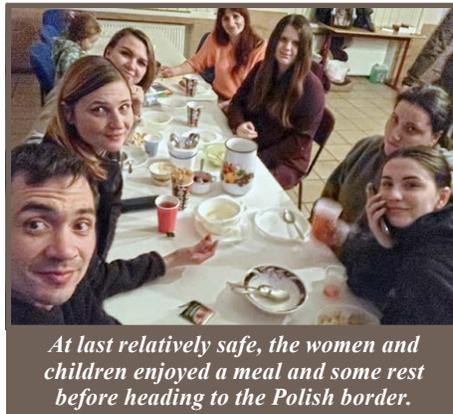
main battlefield. We barely slept due to constant sirens and explosions. But praise the Lord, we survived.

In the morning, praise God, the soldiers let us leave the city. I drove a crazy, zigzag route as we passed between tank battles and tried as much as possible to avoid the most dangerous places. Some roads along the route were horrendous, but relatively safe. Eventually, we reached quieter regions, where we all felt great relief.

As we progressed farther west, the ladies and girls in my car were amazed to see relative peace in towns outside the car windows. Normal public transportation, functioning traffic lights, supermarkets selling food—such things astonished them. They had thought the hell they'd experienced in Chernihiv raged all over Ukraine. Praise the Lord, they were wrong.

At last, we reached the western city of Ternopil, where fellow BIEM missionary pastor Vitaly and his church received us with abundant love and kindness. As it turned out, volunteers from Poland were at the church that day. They offered those two families free transportation into Poland. Now they are safe in Warsaw and Krakow.

In closing, let me mention that one of the young ladies I rescued was the very first convert of our Chernihiv church. I've known her since she was sixteen. The youngest little girl just turned four. As in the story about starfish, I wish I could rescue so many more. Still, I rejoice that



At last relatively safe, the women and children enjoyed a meal and some rest before heading to the Polish border.

God used me and my car to deliver seven lives from a city under siege with almost no way out.

Please keep praying for Chernihiv. Many suffering people, including little babies, remain there. Please pray for Ukraine and support BIEM's War Relief efforts.

Thank you very much, brothers and sisters in Christ.

Postscript: *Two days after these events, BIEM learned that the electrical and water utilities in Chernihiv ceased working. Internet service also experienced problems. Yet, various individuals and families from the church remain in Chernihiv, including young children. Some remain at home; others hide in bomb shelters. Yet, despite all the horrors, we see a ray of light in this message, "Thank you for the prayers. In fact, not only believers feel God's protection, but even non-believers see God's intervention."* ■

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8. Providing meals and housing to refugees who arrive in Poland.
9. Assisting families who have fled to Poland in obtaining Emergency US visas.
10. Placing Ukrainian refugees in American homes willing to receive them.
11. At some point, we may need more families willing to accept Ukrainian refugees. If you are interested, we will add you to the list of those willing to consider it. This would not be a commitment. When such opportunities arise, you would be contacted with more information so you would

understand everything involved before volunteering.

12. We expect to host many Ukrainian refugees at and near our headquarters in the Indianapolis, Indiana, area. A passenger van is needed to provide transportation. Maybe you know of a church or an organization that has a van they would be interested in donating to this cause. Please contact us.
13. Most of all, we need the fervent, constant prayer of God's people. Pray for Ukraine, pray for our missionaries, pray for the leaders of Ukraine, and pray for God's mercy for the sake of so many millions who are in such grave danger.

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Serving Hungry Bodies and Needy Souls

Hello! Thank you for being concerned. It's such an encouragement when someone asks how we are, how they can help.

We are at home.... We have not gone anywhere. Our parents are with us. Now fighting is going on here, but we have decided to stay and help in whatever ways we can. My husband Sergei and I help to prepare food and deliver it wherever necessary—to hospitals, to orphanages, to rehab centers, to checkpoints, and to ordinary people, especially the elderly.

Our son and daughter bake bread, and in their free time they help in the church however needed. My parents help to distribute food and bread in the café. Papa is also witnessing for the Lord.

During these sixteen days we have already gotten used to the roar. We are not so frightened. We thank God for every day we have lived. We feel especially grateful in the morning, that we have woken up. I've learned to appreciate a lot of things.

— Julia [the daughter of BIEM missionaries in northern Ukraine] ■



Buckets of fresh-made soup, ready for distribution.



In western Ukraine, Pastor Vitaly prays with a new group of weary refugees.



Countless Ukrainian families squeezed bedding into basements or root cellars for protection from shelling.



This church quickly converted its auditorium into a place for exhausted families to rest.

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In closing, I'd like to say this invasion caught the world off guard. But it didn't catch God off guard. Year after year, churches in the US have preached and taught the Bible, which includes detailed stories of how God's people boldly served Him despite wars, dungeons, exiles, jails, shipwrecks.... If any modern-day believer assumes those Bible-time stories have no relevance for believers today, that person is pitifully mistaken. Now it's our turn to equip ourselves with those spiritual lessons from yesteryear and step up to the plate. It's our turn to let our lights shine for Christ during dark and fearsome days.

A British poster in World War II stated, "Keep calm and carry on." Let me revise that: Keep calm and glorify God. We can do so with our hearts, our wallets, our homes, the Gospel, and a caring, Christ-like spirit.

If this invasion serves as a test for God's people, then let's not fail that test.

And let's not settle for a mediocre grade of "C." No, let's honor God and strive for a "Grade A" response to these troublesome times.

BIEM has always been a partnership of you, God's people, supporting our workers in ministry. Well, the ministry in one of our key nations suddenly morphed and grew, but the principle is unchanged. We can't reach souls with the Gospel or help the hurting without you.

Will you pray for us and for Ukraine and for Ukrainians who are now homeless? Will you give? Will you adopt the lyrics to the children's song, "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine," and then shine brightly for God? I pray you will. Thank you.

In Christ's service,

Sam Slobodian

Sam Slobodian
President, BIEM



After two weeks of basement dwelling under bombardments, Lesya's husband crept outside to find food. Days later, some men discovered his dead body.



Weary, Sasha and her children reached safety in Poland. Her husband remains in Ukraine to serve others.

For more information, please log onto our website, **BaptistInternational.org**, where you will find more details about these needs plus **Video Updates** from our personnel in Ukraine. To help, please designate your gifts Ukrainian War Relief. ■

"Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body." (Hebrews 13:3)

