



## Dear Praying Friends in Europe,

As we read this issue of the Canopy, let us remember Paul's exhortation to the Galatians in Chapter 6:9-10 *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."*

It would be easy to neglect these verses in a time when all of us across Europe are facing economic and energy uncertainty but these are exactly the times we should look beyond ourselves. We can all pray, and as Ukraine features less on our TV screens let us also ask ourselves "What more can I do?"

### Ukrainian refugee crisis

Do you remember the blood-curdling breaking news that morning? The unending stream of military vehicles invading Ukraine? The heart-breaking pictures from Bucha's massacre and the shelled residential homes of Kiev? All this in the heart of Europe, almost 80 years after WW2. But why? After more than 200 days we are still waiting for answers. The fact is that on February 24th the Russian Federation launched an undeclared, unprovoked full-scale war on Ukraine. These devastating attacks caused an immediate flood of refugees from the entire country to neighbouring countries, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania, in particular. It created an enormous challenge for these countries. Thankfully, it also brought the best out of the people and governments. In the first weeks literally millions of people appeared at the borders in need of food, accommodation and – the most important – acceptance. According to the latest numbers, over 11 million Ukrainians have been displaced from their homes, of whom 7 million fled abroad. At the time this article is being written, still an average of 15,000 people cross over the border from Ukraine into Hungary alone each day. The majority of these people travel further to other Western European countries and try to find work. Ukraine has the sympathy of the World as being the victim of an aggressor and the Ukrainians are welcomed in every country they go to. Possibly most of these people will stay in their host countries.

But not everyone dares or desires to start a new life abroad. On the Ukrainian side of the border there are tens of thousands from Eastern Ukraine staying in refugee camps, schools, kindergartens or other governmental buildings in the hope that they will be able to return to their homes once the war is over. They refuse to think that in many cases there will be no homes to return to. These refugee camps are everywhere in Transcarpathia – the far-western county of Ukraine – which is considered, at the moment, a place of safety. The Carpathian Mountains, as a natural border, separates this part from the rest of the country. Putin's bombs do not fall in this remote area, or at least this is the hope of many who came here to find shelter. Until now, there was only



one incident: a missile attack on the May 3rd, destroying the transformer station of a small mountain village near the Hungarian border.

I had the privilege to live in Ukraine for 11 years as a missionary. That is why the first news about the Russian attack shocked me and immediately I started to search for opportunities of how I could help. Not long after the war started, I loaded my vehicle full with relief goods and drove to the Ukrainian border. It was a surrealistic experience to cross the border while all others moved in the opposite direction. Since then, I have visited Ukraine at least 10 times visiting refugee places bringing them food, clothes and household machines. I sometimes go alone or join others that are also active in helping refugees.



The obvious question is what should the followers of Jesus do in this situation? Will we just stand aside and expect the World to solve their problems while we are busy with our "religious duties"? Or do we dare to stand up and go where the need is? Do we dare to be real salt and light in this World and show the love of our Saviour to people who wonder where God is when they are in trouble? God is there to show his love through his people. We are Christ's hands to give, his legs to go, his lips to speak comfort, and his eyes to encourage. As the Apostle expresses it: "faith working through love". This is Christianity in practice, and not just words. If we want to practice our "religious duties", here is how to show God's love to the World.

### Prayer points:

- that the war would soon end and peace negotiations would start;
- that the refugees would experience love and acceptance in the countries where they are staying;
- that the people and organisations who help refugees would not lose their enthusiasm but keep on serving them.

### Update-box

Following the damage to the gas pipelines between Russia and the EU, and also the preparations for Russia to annex four new areas of Ukraine, tensions across Europe are increasing. With heightened rhetoric on all sides, the dangers of escalation are increasingly real with threats of further sanctions and, more worryingly, of nuclear attacks. How do we as the body of Christ respond to the real prospect of mass displacement of people across the continent? Not only as we are seeing in Ukraine itself, but also now from Russia, as many rush to escape the realities of forced conscription by the Kremlin. Should we be closing our borders to those who want no part in what is internationally acknowledged as an illegal war? We need God's wisdom to know how to respond.

### Additional Prayer Points:-

1. Pray for the new right wing governments in Sweden and Italy and their relationships within the EU and with other European nations.
2. Pray for the Bulgarian people who are facing their 4th general election in 18 months and pray that this time a viable government can be formed.

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