



Dear Praying Friends in Europe,

"Christ Jesus has taken hold of me", and "I will take hold of him," the apostle Paul confessed, and he subordinated everything in his life and ministry to this. He did not look at the sacrifice, but only at the sacrifice of Christ; he did not want to please men, but only the Lord; he did not want to live his own life, but only the Lord's. He lived a crucified life, as his Lord expected of him. He used this Greek word to describe his life: *ἀγών* (agon), meaning struggle, fight (see: Phil 1:30; 2 Tim 4:7). He was like the athlete running for victory in the arena, who in the end won the crown of righteousness, and bequeathed his life of struggle to all Christ-followers of all ages. Now the baton is in our hands, we must run our course victoriously. We are the ones God can use in these days, we must do God's work and we must leave a spiritual legacy for the generation that comes after us. May God grant that we prove worthy of his calling!

FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE FROM WAR-TORN UKRAINE

Over the past year, I have volunteered eight times to deliver aid to war zones in eastern Ukraine. Once to Irpin and Kyiv, six times to Kherson and most recently to Kharkiv province. On these trips, I was able to see first-hand the horrors of war and meet people who, even in this hell, are serving people with the love of Christ.

The third year of the Ukrainian-Russian war is wearing the Ukrainian population down to the bone. The whole country is characterised by a sense of hopelessness replacing optimism. Everyone hopes the war will end, but no one can say when or how it will end. Ukraine is making terrible sacrifices for its survival, facing one of the most powerful armies in the world with one of the largest reserves. They have already experienced the consequences of the Russians taking a town or village. The Ukrainian authorities were also horrified when torture chambers and mass graves were discovered in liberated areas. Local residents who lived through the occupation tell horror stories of the beastly acts committed by Russian soldiers. Ukraine is resisting because it knows what it would face if Russia occupied their land.



The Russian leadership that launched the war certainly did not count on the tenacious and heroic resistance of the Ukrainians and the huge loss of life. They expected a quick victory, perhaps thinking that Ukrainian society would look upon them as liberators. They were quickly driven out of the territory they had occupied at the start of the war by the Ukrainian army's offensive in the autumn, and for a while it looked as if they would be put on the defensive by the Ukrainian army. Towns and villages were liberated one by one, and even the Russian-speaking population cheered the Ukrainian soldiers. The arrival of the Russian Wagner Group failed to make any significant difference to the situation, and on the whole the Russians were losing on all fronts. Western public opinion was unanimous in its support for Ukraine, with dissenting voices coming only from neighbouring Hungary, and still do to this day.

Ukrainian public opinion became very optimistic after the success of the autumn offensive, and began to believe that Ukraine could survive and even win this war. In the spring, another major operation was planned, but it failed, as by then the Russians were already prepared to defend themselves and the attacks were blocked by the Surovikin Defence Lines. Since then, the Russian offensive has been continuous, with the Ukrainians on the defensive on all sections of the more than 1,000 km front. Although there have been some surprising successes for the Ukrainians (see the Ukrainian invasion of the Kursk region), in heroic battles, they are losing villages and towns in Eastern Ukraine one after another. This is where the war is now.



As I mentioned at the beginning, some of my fellow volunteers and I regularly deliver aid to war-affected areas. We use the money raised to buy food and other necessities in Ukraine. In eastern Ukraine, we are in contact with Christian brothers and sisters who are helping to provide aid locally. In Kherson, a shopping centre has been converted into a relief centre. Unfortunately, the building was hit just recently. On our last trip we took aid to the villages of Balakliya, Izyum and Kam'yanka in Kharkiv County, where local Baptist brothers helped with the distribution. These areas are still dangerous, practically on the front line, most of them mined by the Russians. In Kam'yanka, for example, the whole village is mined, we could only get around on the

paved road, and all the houses and public buildings in the village are in ruins, and there are still about 70 people living there. We visited them with food parcels and listened to their stories of the occupation. One elderly man, after showing us his ruined house and the wreckage of his car, told us how his wife died when she went next door to get some fat. A rocket hit the house just as she was coming out. She died in front of him. Another elderly couple invited us into their yard to show us their land, where they grew lavender and tulips. Now they watch helplessly as the cleared land is overgrown. Another person told me that there were 120 cows in the village. The Russians wouldn't let their farmers out to milk them. The animals were crying loudly until they were finally shot from a Russian helicopter.

We met the local Baptist pastor in Balakliya, who was captured and tortured by the Russians during the occupation because of his faith. He was taken to hospital with life-threatening injuries and escaped by hiding in an ambulance with his doctor. He was eventually hospitalized and treated in Poland. As soon as Balakliya was freed, he returned to his church. They provide 300 hot meals a day to the needy and go to villages in the area with aid.

What we can bring in aid is just a drop in the ocean. What means much more to them is that our presence demonstrates that we are there for them, that they are not alone. The world stands in solidarity with them. They feel it when they hug us tightly and for a long time. Thank you for carrying these brothers and sisters in prayer, and also the volunteers, so that they can be the hand, the foot, the smile, the comforting word of Christ to those who are suffering at this critical time.



Prayer Points:

- For local Christians who are helping the people
- For volunteers who bring aid to these areas
- For the Ukrainian Christians who are suffering in the areas occupied by Russia, and for the Russian believers who are helping them. The body of Christ is at work on both sides!
- For World leaders to help the peace process

Europeans United in Prayer – our most recent prayer conference!

Last month we met in Budapest Hungary to pray for the country, for Europe and for Israel. We were from 7 different countries including many Hungarian brothers and sisters. There was strong unity between us and we were desperate to meet God genuinely in prayer. He did meet us and led us deep into prayer for Hungary. The Hungarian believers were very touched. In fact, we felt that we reached a new level in prayer, which was very encouraging, and we are already looking forward to the next prayer gathering, in Moldova in April 2025.

At the end we were left with some outstanding costs, because we supported some people who could not afford to attend. If you are able to help cover these costs, please use the Donate button at the bottom, or the bank details. Thank you!

Further Prayer:-

1. Pray for all those affected by the devastating floods in the Valencia region; that help will come quickly to clean up and rebuild communities and that the Lord will comfort those who are grieving.
2. Donald Trump's victory in the USA will affect Europe in many ways: e.g. trade, energy, defence, sustainability, finance. Pray for a healthy relationship between the USA and Europe.

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