

The Ministry of Churches in Ukraine During Times of War

By Dr. Valeriy Antonyuk
President of the All-Ukrainian Union of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists

*Presented at the 66th Annual National Prayer
Breakfast in Washington DC, on February 7, 2018*

Ever since the war broke out in eastern Ukraine, evangelical churches in Ukraine have worked together to serve the Ukrainian army and their society. This unique time has been filled with serious challenges due to the ongoing conflict. For three years, Ukrainian churches of different confessions and denominations have conducted thousands of projects related to humanitarian aid and social outreach.

Humanitarian Aid Outreach

In response to the hostilities in eastern Ukraine, volunteers from local churches started putting together relief kits filled with food, medicine, clothes, and household items, which they sent to soldiers serving on the front lines. This increased volunteer activity encouraged churches and regional associations to support the Ukrainian army by launching a number of charitable organizations and foundations that provide assistance for soldiers and others in need. Christian charitable organizations also provide local hospitals with food and medical/dental equipment from the US, Canada, and Europe.

Counseling Ministry

Today in Ukraine, many young soldiers are returning to civilian life with serious psychological trauma, which leads to destructive behavior, and in some cases, suicide. In 2015-2017, a number of Christian centers were created to provide counseling care for former soldiers, and church leaders and volunteers are also distributing a number of Christian books, including Bibles, to those serving in the army.

Ministry in Eastern Ukraine

Many people living in front-line territories are in great need of support from the Church, and many of them are very open to the gospel. Some of them have even started attending church. Christians are providing them with food and clothing, while also conducting special programs and worship services. Christian doctors in eastern Ukraine are also regularly treating people in front-line villages. In the last few years, churches in eastern Ukraine have doubled and even tripled in size, and many new churches are being planted. Today, the Church is seen as a source of both physical and spiritual care for those in need.

Military Chaplains

After the war broke out, we saw the creation of a military chaplain ministry, something that had never before happened in Ukraine. In June 2017, the government officially approved the Chaplain Corps, and today there are more than 100 full-time chaplains from the UOC-KP, the UGCC, and Protestant churches serving through the Ministry of Defense in the heart of the war zone, along with ministering to veterans. Still others are working with widows and children that have lost their husbands and fathers to the war, along with injured soldiers receiving treatment at hospitals.

Since the beginning of the conflict, chaplains have provided resettlement services for military personnel who lost their homes in the conflict. They are also bringing food, medicine, and clothing to those serving on the front lines. During the fighting at Donetsk International Airport, 7 chaplains were serving among the Ukrainian soldiers, and 5 of them were injured.

Ministry to Orphans and Widows

Thousands of churches have developed ministry programs to serve the great number of widows and orphans produced by the war through Scripture distribution, prayer, and legal assistance. Christian charity organizations also care for these widows by bringing them food and medicine, and by organizing retreats that provide both physical and spiritual rejuvenation.

International Partnerships

Churches in Ukraine are partnering with international organizations, particularly the UN, UNICEF, and the Red Cross, to care for those in need. They are also working with many American, Canadian, and European ministry organizations, with which they have implemented hundreds of effective outreach projects and distributed hundreds of thousands of pounds of humanitarian aid relief to Ukraine. Through these efforts, churches are providing humanitarian aid relief, medical aid, home repairs, reimbursement of life expenses, housing services, and many other forms of outreach.

We express our sincere gratitude to everyone who has joined in these vital humanitarian aid efforts in Ukraine during this time of war and turmoil.