

Faith during wartime



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Shock and disbelief were my first two reactions when I awoke on 24 February to the news that Russia had invaded Ukraine. Horror as I saw residential buildings across the country bombed. Outrage as civilians were trapped by shelling in cities to the south and east of the country. Compassion as I saw the millions massing in L'viv awaiting passage to safety. And thanksgiving as I saw the welcome being extended by the people in surrounding nations.

I have no idea what the situation will be when you read this. It changes by the hour, and writing on such a fast-moving situation seems futile. But if you felt some of the same reactions as me, you too will be asking the same two questions, 'what can I do, and how should I pray?'

Prayer

My prayers were angry, fearful, uncertain. Then I heard Mark Meynell in Bucharest talking with Tim Farron on the 'A Mucky Business' podcast¹ about the stories he heard from the Ukrainian church since the war began. He shared how turning to the book of Habakkuk had helped him to pray. Habakkuk 1:2-5 expressed almost everything I felt, and 2:2-14 expressed everything about God's anger at injustice – much of it sounding eerily contemporary! At an ICMDA leaders' gathering a few days later, as we prayed and planned our responses to the situation, we prayed from Psalm 46, reminding us that the Lord:

...makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. (Psalm 46:9)

Only God can stop the SU-24 assault aircraft, the T-80 tank, or the AK-47 assault rifle. Only he can thwart evil and injustice and end suffering. Scripture is an excellent guide to prayer in the face of such circumstances – the Psalms and prophets, in particular, express those thoughts and feelings we struggle to articulate, especially when faced with something as awful as the war in Ukraine. It is also a comfort to know that whatever evils we face today, the world has seen them before, God has dealt with them before, and he will deal with them again.

The International Christian Medical and Dental Association (ICMDA) has run several regular Ukraine prayer meetings on Saturdays to share news, encourage informed prayer across the globe, and mobilise practical support. Contact them to find out more.²

Action

The welcome being extended by the people of Eastern Europe to the more than two million Ukrainians who

have so far fled the war has been humbling. Ordinary people welcoming refugees into their homes, WhatsApp groups set up to share the availability of accommodation, schedule lifts, and coordinate supplies – all set up and run by ordinary people, especially through local churches. Churches here in the UK have been coordinating collections and shipping supplies out, especially to Poland, which contends with nearly two million refugees on its own.

Another vulnerable group caught up in this conflict is the thousands of international students studying in Ukraine. ICMDA are in contact with many medical students who have had to abandon studies and flee to Europe. Their welcome has been more uncertain. Many are from the Middle East, South Asia and Africa, and some have been met with hostility and racism at the borders. These students need particular help and support, as their passports and visas do not give them automatic refugee status. They can face further racism and suspicion on trying to enter the EU and other neighbouring countries, making it even harder for them than fleeing Ukrainians. ICMDA is working hard to help those they know about through Ukrainian partner organisations and the Ukrainian Christian Medical Association.

Sourcing supplies locally and using local skills and suppliers is both more cost-effective and faster than getting provisions together and sending them from the UK. One of the best ways to support refugees and those in the war zone is to give money to organisations with those local connections and contacts.

The UK Disasters and Emergencies Committee (DEC) coordinates a national appeal, with £25 million matched funding from the British Government via *UK aid*, to get supplies and resources to those in most need.³ In its first five days, it raised £75 million on top of that Government funding, showing the substantial public concern for those displaced by this war.⁴

But the needs within Ukraine are even more significant. Food and medical supplies are particularly needed. Thankfully, all the borders from neighbouring nations to the west of Ukraine remain open, so getting supplies in is still relatively easy. CMF Poland and CMA Ukraine have been working together to buy, collect, transport, and distribute medical supplies, supported by funds raised by ICMDA from their appeal fund.

CMF will be sharing news and resources from partners in the UK and overseas in the coming weeks and months, so check your inboxes! Please continue to pray. You can give to the ICMDA Ukraine Appeal at icmda.net/ukraineappeal

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references (accessed 8/3/22)

1. Ukraine and Russia: how do we respond? *A Mucky Business*. 1 March 2022. bit.ly/3Myx7ax
2. icmda.net/about/contact
3. DEC. Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal. bit.ly/3Kp7bwj
4. Associated Press. Ukraine aid appeal tops £100m in UK. *The Guardian*. 7 March 2022. bit.ly/3IT4wuA