



# HELPING UKRAINE

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

5th May 2022

*If people live only 70 years, then a state, a nation or a civilization, which may last for 1000 years, is more important than an individual. But if Christianity is right, then not only is the individual more important, but he is incomparably more important. After all, he is an eternal being, whereas a state or civilization lasts a mere moment in comparison.*

*(C. S. Lewis - Mere Christianity)*

**D**ear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I was impressed by this quote because I just recently turned 70. It is very comforting to realize that man is an eternal being, even though the body is slowly passing away.

It is also encouraging that not only civilizations, but also states and regimes (even the current Russian one) do not last so long and are not more important than eternal human beings. It is good to gain distance from events that affect us immediately and sometimes seem unsurmountable. But our distance must not be so big that we stop helping and stop praying. We are not helpless and all good deeds and prayers add up, or perhaps even multiply. We may not see the results immediately, but they are stored somewhere and will manifest themselves in due time. It is good that we have such a great and all-powerful Lord!

*Jaroslava Honová, Jihlava UMC*

**T**hank you all very much for your support of our efforts to help those fleeing the war in Ukraine.

Your funds help those in need here in the Czech Republic and in Ukraine.

Thank you for making this possible with your support!

On the following pages, you will find a summary of current information *from parishes and churches, from Christian Aid Centres, from the facilities we operate for refugees*, as well as *the status of the fundraiser*.

## ■ What is happening in parishes and congregations

ECM parishes and congregations helping Ukraine — week 25 April – 1 May 2022

### Jihlava

Activities for people from Ukraine are underway. Several visitors came for a Bible group in Russian, four mothers with children came for a friendly conversation in Czech, and new faces appeared at the Sunday service in addition to the regulars. Two youngsters will be going with our Royal Rangers group (similar to Scout Boys) to the Ringotournament (thanks to the RR leaders for their willingness and to our church donors for their financial support). We are very grateful for all the volunteers who are involved in the activities and also for the language and communication skills of our coordinator Alexandra Grace. She handles phone support for many women in their concerns, and also helps with children's school issues. In handing out tracts and passing out items, she manages to strike up a conversation and share the gospel in a natural way. Humanitarian aid (clothes, food...) continues to be given.

We are working with the Orthodox Church, which cares for a large number of refugees and welcomes help with arranging things at the bank and negotiating around job offers. The Orthodox Church also had plenty of winter clothes that nobody wanted anymore - we managed to arrange with the Roman Catholic Charity in Broumov to take them away. Some families moved into empty flats – there is a need for furniture, and the nearest furniture bank is in Brno. We are therefore looking for help with transport (we would welcome offers from other ECM congregations as well).



Spring has begun and Ukrainian mothers are asking for bicycles, scooters and bikes for their children. Many people have responded to the appeal - thank you all, they have made the children very happy and have greatly encouraged their mothers. (We are still looking for scooters, and we also welcome balls.) Registration for the nursery is coming up, but places are scarce, and it will be a problem as there is no central database of available places. If Ukrainian mothers want to work, a nursery for their children is a key thing.

*Libuše Hajčiarová, administrative worker at Jihlava UMC*

## Praha Strašnice

After 6 weeks we said goodbye to Mrs. Oxana's family. They moved from our basement, which they thanked us for often, to a rented apartment. A member of our congregation helped with the lease and put in a good word with the real estate agency, so in the end they didn't get a rent increase over the previous tenant. We visited the family after a week, and they seemed happy. We will try to continue to keep in touch.

Our basement is available again after a few days of preparation and we will see who the Lord God brings us now.

On Wednesdays when we have the church open to the public, we are still taking up a food collection. However, the number of people bringing food has greatly decreased. This is understandable. Last Wednesday, however, I experienced something encouraging. A lady came to see if the collection to Ukraine was still on. When I told her that it was, she told me that she and her husband were going to bring some food in a little while, but that they didn't have a car, so she came to ask beforehand so as not to carry it unnecessarily. I was completely moved when I later saw this elderly couple carrying a box of food down the street so they could contribute.

*Milan Mrázek, pastor*

## ■ What is happening in our refugee facilities

The Diakonia of the Czech UMC arranges and organizes accommodation for refugees in three facilities: two church facilities - the Veselka recreation house near Vimperk and the Poušť recreation area near Bechyně, and one borrowed - the Dekonta recreational house in Vojnův Městec (staffed by the Christian Aid Center Ječmínek, Žďár nad Sázavou). Coordination is provided by the director Karel Nyerges ([diakonie@umc.cz](mailto:diakonie@umc.cz)).

## Diakonia UMC

### *Another personal testimony from our centres*

*"I didn't want to leave, but my husband told me that if we don't leave now, we won't get out of here. I left because of the children."*

My name is S. and I am about to turn 31. I live in a small village in the Cherkassy region of Ukraine and make my living in agro-tourism.

Our village is about 230 km from Kiev, which my husband says is a short distance for tanks and weapons, and they can be here in no time.

My husband stayed at home after we left and is trying to help. He prepares Molotov cocktails and "hedgehogs" for anti-tank defense, always on the alert and ready. He volunteered for any work, but said it was not needed yet. The local villagers say they are safe for now, but the husband does not want to remain idle and wants to play some part in defending his country.

The villagers provide the nearby towns with food in the form of canned meat. Many are trying to help in any way they can. The locals, however, believe that they will not be touched by the ongoing war, at least in the sense that they will not be bombed or attacked - but no one knows. They are afraid, they are worried, but they tell themselves that it does not concern them.

A lot of people from Kiev have fled to our village, there are three or four cars parked in every yard. But unfortunately there are also people who are not interested in participating in anything or helping with anything. I was expecting a lot more people to get involved in the help and that it would be more visible. Now I am a bit disappointed.

My husband has joined militia and is actively helping with anything needed where we live, even though we have a farm and an agritourism business. However, there are also a lot of people who just sit around, do nothing and just get through these challenging times. My husband is also disappointed with this situation because he expected much more involvement from the locals given the size of our village. Our acquaintance, an 18-year-old boy, and his father have registered with the military administration so that they can go to the front to fight if needed; they are not hiding, but waiting with other members of the militia when the time is right to enlist.

We decided to leave Ukraine, followed a relative of a friend to the Czech Republic and drove 15 hours by car to the Polish border. At the Polish border we waited in line for 6-7 hours. The border guards noticed that we had a baby with us, so they sped up our border crossing. They sent us to the bus stops of the buses heading inland. We boarded a bus that took us to an asylum centre. From there we took another bus that took us to a village where we took a train that was a direct connection to Prague. From Prague we took the train to Plzeň. There we visited friends, ate and had a shower. A little while later, one of the volunteers called us and escorted us to a minibus, which took us to our destination late at night.

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This article was written as an authentic testimony. Due to the sensitivity of the information in the text, the real names of the people involved are not mentioned due to possible identification and misuse.

*Karel Nyerges, director of Diakonia UMC*

## *Recreational house Dekonta in Vojnův Městec*

The Dekonta facility in Vojnův Městec currently accommodates 15 refugees, a total of three families who are now living together. They have quickly acclimatised and will start working when they find employment in the vicinity. One of the women even commutes to Prague to work in her field. The Ukrainian children are slowly integrating at school. The kindergarten is now at full capacity, but in the future - after the holidays - it will be possible to adapt the younger children to a normal way of life and bring them into contact with other children.



These Ukrainian families have never been to the Czech Republic. Despite the fact that they like it here, when they look at the landscape in the spring sunshine, they remember what it would be like if there was no war in their country. What it would be like to be at home with their loved ones...

*Christian Aid Centre Ječmínek*

## **How we handle funds in the transparent account and donations from abroad:**

- Priorities for the use of resources respond to a changing and evolving situation. Given the difficulty of forecasting, the strategy is refined at regular intervals with particular regard to the effectiveness and sustainability of our aid - also in view of the commitment we have made to the specific people in our facilities and the trust they have placed in us.

- The main priority for us now is to secure and maintain the assistance to those who have already entrusted themselves to our Diakonia, parishes and centers, and to extend and continue this assistance. We do not forget about the direct humanitarian aid going to Ukraine, where we consider it important to effectively use the synergies with our Russian-speaking UMC and our direct contacts in Ukraine as well as our knowledge of the local terrain.
- On the basis of the actual operations to date, we are in the process of quantifying the costs of operating the refugee facilities established by Diakonia. For the time being, we expect to operate these facilities for at least the next six months. Even if the war ends immediately, the reconstruction of Ukraine and the need for refugees to stay abroad will take longer.
- With this in mind, we are also transferring a portion of the funds directly to Diakonia UMC - to an operationally earmarked account dedicated to the operation of our refugee facilities, and to enable longer-term planning and organization of this assistance.
- Diakonia UMC also tries to take advantage of all current opportunities for financial support to refugees from the state. Despite the government's media image, not everything is working as declared so far. Diakonia also tries to link our facilities with the respective municipalities and obtain their material and non-material support.
- Our churches and Christian Aid Centers respond selflessly and promptly to the need for help in their places of operation. These are also churches that find it difficult to manage a balanced budget on their own. It will therefore also be necessary to support them in their assistance to those fleeing the war in the medium and long term.
- The specific financial flows and the use of funds are currently approved by the Diakonia UMC Director together with the superintendent and the Head of the District Office. Daniela Hajčiarová (pomahame.ukrajine@umc.cz) is the contact person for collecting any requests from congregations and Christian Aid Centers for financial support within the framework of the transparent collection.
- All funds raised are earmarked for aid to Ukraine. Should an unexpected favorable situation arise and there is no further need to fund aid here in the Czech Republic or humanitarian shipments, any remaining funds would go directly to the rebuilding of Ukraine in cooperation with the Ukrainian Methodist Church.

*Thank you to everyone who is involved in helping those in need financially, by prayers, as well as with practical help and their time and energy.*

*Edited by Daniela Hajčiarová*