Ukraine Summer 2023

christian response to eastern europe

The war in Ukraine has been going on for more than a year now and the effect has been felt throughout the world but especially in poorer countries and obviously in Ukraine where missiles continue to rain down and the war continues.

We all have heard about the millions who fled Ukraine to seek refuge in other countries and this is heart-breaking. Many may well never return to their country, their homes, their family and friends but prefer to start a new life in the wealthier and more stable West.

This is home, mainly destroyed, but home

Whilst millions are safe there are several million internally displaced refugees in Ukraine, many trying to survive in previously occupied regions. Living in villages that have largely been destroyed, in houses that are basically ruins, is an impossible challenge.

Before the invasion of Ukraine life was very difficult in rural areas where they survived by living on all they grew and the animals they kept. When the Russian troops invaded not only did they destroy houses, public buildings, schools, hospitals etc. but also stole food, looted anything of value including fridges, freezers, televisions, everything. What they didn't steal they destroyed. Their animals were taken or just killed.

Families and the elderly living in unimaginable conditions

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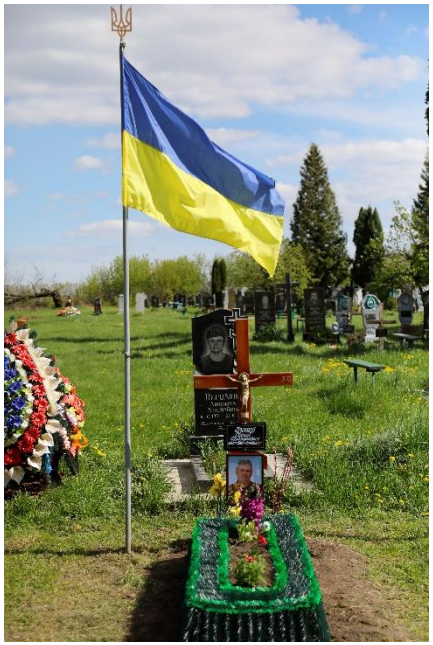
Inevitably, when the Ukrainian army fought to liberate these regions further damage to buildings was unavoidable. Families now have the seemingly impossible challenge to live in what remains of their community. Many of the fields where once they grew their crops are now peppered with antipersonnel mines making cultivation either impossible or at best, extremely dangerous.

The angelic look of children conceals horrors they have witnessed

Despite all the dangers ordinary life must go on and "normal problems" dealt with. As adults this is a very worrying and seemingly impossible ask but what about the children? How will they cope? Schools are now open provided they have an air-raid shelter or cellar where the children can take refuge in the event of attack. Life goes on but is far from normal.

Children in school are told about the war, after all it cannot be ignored. The children will frequently have a father or brother fighting or maybe injured or killed, the war cannot be ignored.

In the event of a soldier being killed in action the village and children from the school line the streets; holding flowers, many kneeling, some in prayer, as the coffin passes. The soldier's graves are marked with a Ukrainian flag and it is upsetting to see how many flags there are, even in the smallest villages; evidence of the human cost of those defending their freedom, protecting their families.



It is almost impossible to find a family that has not been affected by death, be that of a family member or neighbour. Living with the constant and real threat of missiles, drones etc. is obviously worrying but it is also exhausting being constantly on high alert and many cannot see how they can continue but they do not have the money or the will to leave.

Whilst many are killed others are injured, frequently by the anti-personnel mines that are scattered over the fields. Anti-personnel mines are designed to injure, not to kill, the idea being it will take at least two to carry an injured soldier, thus taking three away from the fighting, and possibly making them an easy target.

There are many who have serious lower limb injuries, amputations etc.. Worryingly in the battlefields there is little in the way of pain killers; frequently ibuprofen or paracetamol being the only relief offered.

We are pleased to have been able to send much needed medical supplies on our aid lorries. We will continue to gather medical aid to be sent with all the other humanitarian aid.

Away from the battlefront life is becoming increasingly difficult. – As mentioned, in the areas previously occupied surviving amongst landmines and undischarged ammunition can prohibit their normal way of life and is very worrying for those families with young children, but even away from all of this life is very difficult.

Many of the mines have been marked with sticks, but not all. The markers vary from a piece of material or plastic tied to a stick or even an empty beer-can stuck on the top. The warnings vary but the message is the same.

Constantly living under such conditions is emotionally exhausting. Just surviving such conditions where fields cannot be used to grow the food they need makes it impossible to survive without help.

Whilst serving army personnel receive a salary, but if they are missing, this stops. The horrifying fact is all too frequently little is left of those who are killed. If a soldier is missing, not only does it leave the family worrying their loved one is dead but without the evidence of a body to bury and mourn, but also the salary stops resulting in the family having no income for food etc.. This is the case for Margareta and Svetlana pictured right.

The girls' father is missing in the war, they assume dead. With no income mum tried to find work but the only opportunity was in Kiev, about 420 km away. The girls live alone now and Margareta, who is just 15 takes care of her little sister Sveta who is 9. They are obviously very worried about their dad, but also concerned for mum who is in Kiev where the attacks have increased. Being separated from their mum is heartbreaking.

The recent destruction of the Kakhovka dam has caused untold misery and suffering. Thousands of families have lost everything, not only their home but everything, all their possessions, photos etc., as well as their community. In the lower reaches of the Dnipro River, tens of thousands are now homeless.

The situation is desperate. We have sent additional lorries filled to the roof and also additional money. After the breach on the dam and resultant flooding fresh water was the biggest need.

We have been looking into ways to help in a more efficient way rather than continuing to take bottled water. Portable water purifiers that have the ability to remove viruses, bacteria and parasites and make the water safe to drink would be a more efficient way to help.

In most areas the flood waters have now receded leaving a trail of destruction behind. The deluge being so intense many buildings were washed completely away whilst others severely damaged. Many of the houses that managed to escape destruction are filled with filthy water leaving thick mud everywhere. Clearing this mess with shovels is a challenge, especially if the water supply is not working.

The clearing up is a hard job, the stinking mud has to be cleared, pumps are needed to clear the water.

The only choice is hard work, and lots of it. Many of the houses are unoccupiable and temporary accommodation in these areas is scarce. They have a very difficult challenge ahead and need all the help and support we can provide.

we are able to provide equipment for new Soup Kitchens, cookers, fridges etc. so we can arrange to make certain they have something good to eat each day.

Providing the kitchen equipment is only part, we will need to make certain they have the food to cook.

With the massive increase in refugees in Ukraine we must increase our effort and support. We propose to support our partners by providing the funds to fit community kitchens and provide fresh food for the needy and displaced.

If successful, not only will food be given to children, the elderly and families in need, but also other humanitarian aid. These centres will give us the opportunity to identify other needs, physical or emotional, which we may be able to help with.

The elderly are having a particularly difficult time at the moment and must not be forgotten; we must not forget anyone young or old.

The suffering and need in Ukraine is huge and we cannot help everyone but we can and will help as many as possible, (maybe more!!).

For over thirty years we have faced seemingly unachievable challenges but thanks to all our fantastic supporters and volunteers we have achieved the seemingly impossible.

Our Humanitarian Aid lorries are always eagerly awaited and distribution normally starts the moment the truck has been unloaded. It is impressive to see the amount we can get onto our lorry.

Distributing aid is so difficult, so many in need. Generally speaking, doing this is safe however there are occasions when it may not be.

When a group were trying to help refugees in the previously occupied regions around Beryslav, Kherson they were spotted by a Russian drone and attacked.

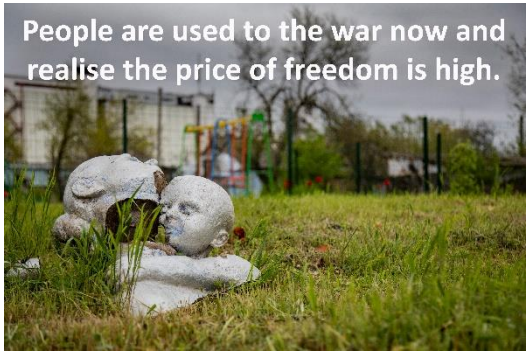
This van hardly looks like a fighting vehicle however despite the red crosses the Russian military felt it was worth attacking.

Ivan was badly injured but amazingly he survived, however he had to have his arm amputated as the doctors could not save it.

Just look at the van, it is incredible he survived, albeit he has to live with life changing injuries as well as the memories, the horror of that day, when all he was trying to do is help refugees.

People try to put the war to one side as life in Ukraine must go on as best it can. People must still try to earn a living, shops and cafés are open, children should go to school and non-war related problems continue. This "normal life" is easier away from the conflict zones, Ukraine is such a huge country many areas are considered safe from missile attacks. This is obviously reassuring but does not get rid of all the other problems associated with the war.

For obvious reasons the greatest government effort is going into the war effort but this is at the cost of many other things. The hospitals have had to cancel many procedures and gaining access to specialists can be more difficult now, especially for those with little money.



Life has changed so much for everyone in Ukraine. Many medical procedures and investigations have been suspended, millions have fled, work is difficult to obtain, prices have shot up and everyone lives with the constant threat of attack.

Just thinking of those in the trenches, living and dying in the mud, fighting for freedom. Many die and many are injured defending the future of their families. Seeing friends and colleagues lying dead in the mud is soul destroying.

When a soldier is injured and in hospital they will frequently receive pictures painted by children in school and a note just to say "Thank You" for fighting for their future. Children are very sensitive and most will have family or know someone fighting, and an upsetting number will know someone killed.

Ukraine has recently taken over from Moldova and is now the poorest country in Europe, not a title they will welcome. Ukraine was doing so well and progressing, especially in the cities. Before the war many of the villages were poor, a familiar sight in Eastern Europe, but now towns and cities are also effected.

The war has reversed the progress, the new wealth annulled, infrastructure destroyed and towns, cities and villages obliterated. New building is at a standstill. In the cities many dilapidated flats that were due for renovations have been left in a dreadful state but still house families.

In summary, many in Ukraine are willing and determined to defend their country however some of the younger men are in constant fear of being sent to the battle front. There is little time to train as a soldier. This is worrying for them, their mothers, wives and indeed the children.

This war has been headline news for over a year now and many people here are tiring of this "old news". When the war first started, we were inundated with wonderful support but much of this has dwindled now, especially financial help.

A separate report will be distributed covering our ongoing work in Moldova. Life in Moldova is very hard and as we have said before, we cannot abandon them and must maintain our support and projects. Moldova may not be the poorest country in Europe but life is harder there now than before, and is largely a country who has lost all hope; very sad.

Since our work started in 1990, we have achieved a huge amount and helped thousands of families. This has only been possible through the fantastic support we have had. Our team of volunteers at our store in Exmouth are nothing short of miracle workers, spending many hours sorting through all the generous donations of medical supplies, food, clothing, bedding and so much more that has been kindly given. The donations of aid and financial gifts has been incredible; ***"Thank You"***

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