



Activities of The United Methodist Church in the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe with/for Refugees from Ukraine *Summary of May 6, 2022*



Spiritual Lessons

At first glance, helping refugees from Ukraine is a matter of compassion. And many people of the UMC have demonstrated in an impressive way that they indeed have an open, empathetic heart. But **Rares Calugar**, district superintendent of the UMC in **Romania**, recently also referred to a spiritual lesson: "Starting even before the war began, we were readying ourselves to respond in whatever ways the Lord opened up opportunities. While we may have had some ideas of the resources we had and thoughts on how we could use them, this entire crisis has been an exercise in joining God in whatever He is doing and where He wants us to be rather than merely using what we have because we can see how that 'could' be helpful." According to him, God invited them "into something bigger by using a larger group of people, partnerships, supporters, grants, and Ukrainian refugees themselves to guide our response". And this understanding then also shapes the view of the worldwide Methodist community that supports the diverse ministries with and for refugees. These are not unknown donors. Rather then, "God has assembled a huge global team ready to do their part", as a recent newsletter of the UMC in Romania states, adding gratitude to the donors "for doing your part and saying yes to what God invited you into".

Referring to C.S. Lewis, **Jaroslava Honová** from Jihlava UMC in **Czechia**, pointed to another spiritual lesson. *"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)* Being encouraged that not only civilizations, but also states and regimes do not last so long and are not more important than eternal human beings, **Jaroslava Honová** wrote in a recent newsletter: "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." And **Jana Křížova**, coordinator of the work with Ukrainian refugees in **Czechia**, shared at a recent online meeting with representatives from various countries that even discouraging experiences, which are also part of this work, "will not stop our help and will not stop us in what we do".

Activities with and for Refugees from Ukraine

Humanitarian Aid Deliveries

Luca Bírtalan, new coordinator of the work with Ukrainian refugees in **Hungary**, pointed to a most recent transport of furniture, clothes, food, bedding, and diapers that was brought to Debrecen. The UMC in Hungary is planning to prepare a place in the second-largest city of the country where donations in kind can be stored and made available to people in need step by step, according to the needs. A few days ago, a consignment of food was additionally brought to a refugee camp in Debrecen where 100 people are living.

Another aim is to support Ukrainian families living near the Hungarian-Ukrainian border and to prepare a delivery of humanitarian aid to them. The needs among the internally displaced people

are great, and, according to **Luca Birtalan**, the population of Transcarpathia increased by 30% since the beginning of the war.

Timotej Tagaj, coordinator of the work with Ukrainian refugees in **Slovakia**, also mentioned a number of humanitarian aid deliveries from the eastern part of the country to Transcarpathia (actually, there are several United Methodist congregations in Slovakia, Hungary, and Ukraine that are located in a circle with a diameter of less than 100km).

Rares Calugar, district superintendent of the UMC in Romania, shared that to date, more than 14 deliveries to various sites in Ukraine have been organized – some were taken all the way to their destination, while others were taken to a point where people from Ukraine were able to come and pick them up, thus completing the delivery. The total value of these consignments from Romania to Ukraine was more than USD 100.000.

According to **Szarlota Kaminska**, coordinator of the work with Ukrainian refugees in **Poland**, the humanitarian aid deliveries from several local churches in the country to Ukraine also continued – and they will continue. The same is true for **Czechia**, as well.

Those responsible for the transports do their best to not send what they have and no longer can use or what they might have received as donations in kind. Rather than, they aim to send what the recipients in Ukraine ask them to be sent and thus really meet the needs of the people living under very difficult circumstances.

Accommodation

Individual people and local churches of the UMC in the various countries directly or indirectly neighboring to Ukraine still open their doors for refugees looking for shelter – either for a few nights only or with a longer-term perspective. In **Romania**, eleven Ukrainians are living at an Orthodox monastery, some women and children have moved into a house that the UMC is renting in the city where they can live communally together. Where this is possible, for instance in **Czechia**, refugees move from long-term housing facilities to rented apartments and increasingly stand on their own feet.

Providing accommodation is one important priority; however, helping people to find work is also very important. And since in many cases the mothers cross the border alone while the husbands and fathers stay in Ukraine to defend their country, a nursery for children of mothers that have found a job is a key thing, as **Libuše Hajčiarová** from Jihlava UMC in **Czechia** emphasizes. And this need, of course, opens up new possibilities for local churches to provide meaningful assistance to refugees from Ukraine.

The Ukrainian "guests" are thankful for what they receive. But a recent newsletter of the UMC in **Czechia** also pointed to a feeling that is there, as well. Referring to families living in a recreational house in Vojnův Městec, the leaders wrote: "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..."

Regular Activities of Local Churches

Jana Křížova from **Czechia** observed that "an increasing number of refugees attends the worship services in various local churches". It is, however, "by no means a result of manipulation or of imposing pressure on them – these people are simply increasingly looking for fellowship". **Sarah Putman** from **Romania** added to this: "The UMC can offer a more holistic care than other NGOs do and minister to the spiritual needs of people, as well – and it is encouraging that people positively respond to this by expressing their wish to explore faith questions, to deal with issues of anger and hatred – but also freedom that comes through forgiveness."

The ministries with and for refugees will continue – responding to needs of today, but also increasingly thinking of a longer-term perspective in order to do the work sustainably.