

# Baptist churches in Ukraine mobilize for ministry

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Even while bombs fell around them, Baptists in Ukraine made plans to care for their neighbors who were displaced by a Russian military invasion.



Elijah Brown

“Twenty-four of the 25 Baptist regions in Ukraine have recorded attacks, including some near their churches,” said Elijah Brown, general secretary of the [Baptist World Alliance](#). “That’s how widespread it is.”

Brown was among 75 Baptists globally who joined a Feb. 24 call with leaders of the Baptist Union of Ukraine and the European Baptist Federation.

Representatives of Texas Baptist Men, the Christian Life Commission, Buckner International and the Joel T. Allison Faith in Action Initiatives at Baylor Scott & White Health also participated.

Brown noted Ukrainian Baptists reported missiles that exploded within 100 meters of an orphanage they support, which houses 60 children. In anticipation of violence involving ground troops, leaders of the orphanage posted notices on all the windows and doors of the building: “Be careful. There are orphans here.”

## **Planning to establish ‘centers of hope’**

Already, Baptists in Ukraine are planning to establish “centers of hope” at churches in each of the nation’s six westernmost regions to shelter displaced families and individuals. They also are mobilizing churches along the most likely evacuation routes to provide care for people journeying from east to west.

“These are places where travelers can get food, rest, wash their clothes and receive spiritual care,” Brown said. “Already, 8,000 copies of the Gospels have been sent to churches to help them as they provide spiritual support.”

The European Baptist Federation—with BWA support— is working closely with the Baptist Union of Ukraine to coordinate [humanitarian relief](#). The first truck loaded with humanitarian supplies left Hungary on Feb. 24 and was expected to cross the border into Ukraine the next day.

On social media, the [European Baptist Fellowship](#) posted a message of solidarity with the people of Ukraine and call to prayer for those in harm’s way.

“The European Baptist Federation laments and denounces the Russian attack begun by Russia on Ukraine early this morning. We pray unceasingly for the people of Ukraine and cry out for God’s protection and justice for the vulnerable,” the post reads.

“We affirm and encourage the work of Ukrainian Baptists in reaching out in the love of Christ to those most affected by the conflict. We call upon those in power to use their courage, wisdom, and resources to make peace and to stop war.

“We as European Baptists stand with our Ukrainian brothers and sisters ready to assist in humanitarian outreach in regions affected by the conflict.”

Peter Mitskevich, a professor of religion in Moscow and a leader in the [Baptist Union of Russia](#), likewise posted on Facebook a message expressing his prayers for Ukraine.

“These days will go down in history. I pray for my relatives in Ukraine, for my brothers and sisters by faith, and for the people of Ukraine. I greet you all dear friends. Peace to your heart. I so wish I could stop the bloodshed,” he posted.

## **‘Disturbing and frightening’**

For Christians in Ukraine, apprehension and uncertainty marked the days leading up to the invasion. Slava Gerasimchuk, a graduate of the B.H. Carroll Theological Institute, teaches Old Testament at Odesa Theological Seminary in Ukraine. In a Feb. 18 email, he called the daily news at that point “disturbing and frightening.”

“The surest thing is that no one is sure of anything,” Gerasimchuk wrote. “Sometimes it seems that the people sitting in the Kremlin are also not completely sure how far they are ready to advance in order to get what they want out of the situation.

“The events that have occurred since the annexation of Crimea and occupation of the Donbass clearly indicate that Putin will go as far as he is

allowed to. He has sufficient military strength to turn most of his threats into reality.”

In comparison, he observed, Ukraine is economically, militarily and politically weak.

“Our leaders are not ready for war. However, Ukraine is backed by many Western countries. It is great to know that we are not alone in this time of great distress and danger for our nation,” Gerasimchuk wrote.

Christians in Ukraine prayed—and asked other Christians globally to join in praying—that “the almighty and merciful Lord will thwart the wicked plans of those who intend to do great harm to our land,” he continued.

## **Hope for the best, prepare for the worst**

While trusting in God and praying for peace, Gerasimchuk also prepared for the worst.

“If the worst scenario does come to pass and the conflict escalates into a full-scale war, I will try to take my family to Western Ukraine or Moldova, where I have many relatives, including my mother and two brothers,” he wrote. “It is quite stressful to be in a situation where you have to consider evacuating your family, but that is a real possibility we are facing.”

About a week before Gerasimchuk’s email, Oleksandr Geychenko, president of Odesa Theological Seminary, sent out a broadly distributed letter describing the situation from his perspective and requesting prayer.

“On the one hand, what you are hearing about now on the news is basically what we have been living with for the last eight years,” he wrote. “The war goes on. Casualties are regular. Negotiations are futile. The rumors of an

invasion intensify from time to time.

“Speaking about life in general, we do not observe any panic around us or serious preparations being made. Life goes on as usual. Almost. We are used to it.

“On the other hand, the situation is also very much different from what we have been living with. Possibly, Ukraine has never seen such an intensive exchange of diplomatic visits and talks, such a heavy influx of military aid from international partners, and such a flow of sensational publications in world news regarding the dates and plans of a Russian invasion. All this makes us realize that the situation is complex and very serious.

“But above all these things, there is the reality of God’s kingdom. God rules over history and directs its movement towards its final goal. He does this in an implicit, hidden, yet irresistible way. The kingdom of this world will one day become the kingdom of God. We do not doubt it!

“So, we just keep doing what we are called to do, even though we know that something is going on. We keep praying to the Lord, trusting him, and following his way. We ask you to join our prayers at this crucial period for our country.”