

Baptists globally called to pray for Ukraine

February 27, 2022

The Baptist World Alliance has invited Baptists worldwide to join in a unified hour of prayer at 9 a.m. Central on Feb. 28.

The global prayer gathering will include prayers voiced from BWA leadership from all six of the ministry's regions around the world.

Christians globally are encouraged to [click here](#) to register their commitment to join in solidarity and prayer at this critical time.

"As brothers and sisters within a global Baptist family, we are all called to be both peacemakers and people of prayer," said Elijah Brown, BWA general secretary "As one Baptist family rooted in Jesus Christ as Lord, we bear witness to the biblical truth that 'if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it.' We know it is vital for Baptists around the world to stand with those who are suffering and to fervently pray for peace."

Throughout the month of March, the European Baptist Federation will host an international prayer gathering on Zoom every Wednesday, rooted in the belief that "prayers are more powerful than anything else." To register, [click here](#).

The BWA also is the lead partner in organizing a multi-faith prayer meeting scheduled at the United Nations Church Center Chapel in New York City at noon EST on Thursday, March 3, "Global Prayers for Ukraine: A Multi-Faith Service for Peace and Freedom in a Hurting World."

"Faith leaders from around the world, including BWA General Secretary Elijah Brown, will be participating in a service of prayer for both the

cessation of violence and the return of freedom to people in Ukraine,” said Scott Stearman, BWA United Nations Representative.

In addition, BWA Women and European Baptist Women United are praying with women’s leaders in both Ukraine and Russia. Brown also is working with Baptist leaders in Russia to plan an upcoming visit to join them in prayer, worship and ongoing ministry.

For churches that want to designate a portion of their worship services to prayer for the people of Ukraine, a prayer guide and additional resources are available [here](#).

Already raised \$250,000-plus in aid

Baptist World Aid Director Marsha Scipio convened a Baptist World Alliance Forum for Aid and Development coordination call on Feb. 25 with representatives from more than 25 Baptist unions and aid organizations, resulting in more than \$200,000 raised within 48 hours of the first airstrike. Attendees pledged to raise additional support over the coming weeks.

“The level of support our global Baptist family is demonstrating to not just the Ukrainian Baptists, but also to the communities in which they serve, is a testament to the strength and generosity of the global Baptist movement,” said Scipio.

“It is a privilege to come alongside courageous Ukrainian pastors who are keeping the church doors open amid inconceivable trepidation, transforming their churches into places of refuge for the displaced. With BFAD, we will continue to respond to the myriad of needs, as a people who believe biblical compassion requires action.”

A video update from General Secretary Brown was distributed to the BWA’s

network of Global Impact Churches, calling for prayer and support, as well as a call to action to its 245 member bodies in 128 countries and territories. BWA President Tomás Mackey issued a statement in both English and Spanish.

“We regret that the humanitarian, economic, political, and other consequences of these actions are serious and painful,” Mackey said. “We have hope in the knowledge that God is at work in the world he loves and in which he has placed us as his disciples who learn from Jesus how to live with integrity the values of his kingdom and how to reflect the fruit of the Holy Spirit.”

Responding to the developing crisis

Earlier in the month in response to the rising tension along the Ukrainian and Russian border, the BWA hosted Igor Bandura, vice president of the All-Ukrainian Union of Associations of Evangelical Christians-Baptists and a BWA General Council Member, at the organization’s headquarters in Falls Church, Va.

Bandura and Brown joined in a series of key meetings and roundtables hosted in Washington, D.C., on Feb. 10 that brought together representatives from human rights and religious freedom organizations in the United States.

With more than 130,000 troops amassed on three sides of Ukraine, Brown traveled to Kyiv the following week to participate in a national prayer gathering on Feb. 16, at St. Sophia Cathedral—the oldest church in Ukraine—where he prayed alongside other faith community leaders, including Catholics, Orthodox and Pentecostals.

Departing less than 100 hours before commercial aviation to Ukraine was suspended, Brown also gathered with the national council of the Baptist

Union as they prayed and prepared to help Baptist churches serve as communities of hope.

On Feb. 24, Ukrainians woke to the sounds of sirens and falling artillery as Russian military launched a full-scale invasion by land, air and sea. Within hours, the European Baptist Federation organized a global solidarity call to hear directly from Baptist leaders in Ukraine. Attended by more than 75 Baptist leaders around the world, the global Baptist community pledged support and prayers as Bandura emotionally described the short-term and anticipated long-term impact of the attacks.

BWA leaders across various departments—including BWA Women, BWAid, Integral Mission and Global Partnerships—have connected with Baptist leaders in Ukraine, Russia and neighboring countries to express support and mobilize responses.

Baptist churches in the westernmost region of Ukraine have established their buildings as “Centers of Hope” to provide food and shelter for the displaced. Hungarian Baptists have set up a humanitarian aid center from which they are distributing food and hygiene kits and providing basic medical care. Baptists in Poland are already welcoming refugees into their homes and churches as well as the Warsaw Baptist Theological Seminary.

Escalation of already existing conflict

Since 2014, portions of eastern Ukraine have been ravaged by political and military conflict, and the already occupied territories have faced increasing persecution and hardship.

“In the Luhansk Occupied Territory, the Ukrainian Baptist churches were officially declared a terrorist organization, therefore requiring all of the churches to close,” Brown said. “The Baptist hymnal and the Gospel of John were outlawed as ‘extremist material.’ The churches that have tried to

remain open do so at great risk and in secret.”

In September 2018, the BWA and the European Baptist Federation (EBF)—one of the six regional fellowships of the BWA—participated in a joint solidarity visit to the border of the occupied territories in a region called the “Gray Zone.” Participants included Brown, Paul Msiza, Tony Peck, Jenni Entrican and Helle Liht.

Despite persecution and the daily hardship of life in an area of conflict, 25 Baptist churches have been established in the Gray Zone in the last five years. Over the last six years, the Baptist union in Ukraine has invested more than \$54,350,000 Ukrainian Hryvnia (equates to over \$2 million USD) into the Gray Zone for aid, relief and community development. Pastors who have fled from the occupied territories and resettled elsewhere in Ukraine, including in Kyiv and Lviv, have started 10 new churches.

Today the All-Ukrainian Union of Associations of Evangelical Christians-Baptists is the second largest Baptist community in Europe and the Middle East and is also the largest Protestant group in Ukraine with over 100,000 members across more than 2,100 churches. They have been a member body of the BWA for 30 years as has the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists.