

Blasts force students to evacuate from Odesa seminary

February 25, 2022

Missile blasts forced the evacuation of students from Odesa Theological Seminary, but administrators and employees of the Baptist school hope the campus may be used to offer aid to people displaced by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Oleksandr Geychenko, president of Odesa Theological Seminary, described the assault on his city and the rapidly changing situation in his country in an email received Friday morning, Feb. 25.

Geychenko wrote about hearing “the sounds of blasts” as missiles hit military targets on Feb. 24, and Ukrainian forces fired air defense shots in return. Some seminary employees said they saw a few drones, but they had no idea if they were Russian or Ukrainian, he stated.

“The attack caught us in the middle of a session,” Geychenko wrote. “We quickly evacuated all the students from our campus. A number of employees who have little children gathered together and moved to one of the regions in western Ukraine where we had previous arrangements with the local Christians.”

However, he and a majority of seminary employees remained in Odesa at this point, he added.

‘Everyone is ready to assist’

“Today, we discussed with the employees the possibility of turning the campus of OTS into [a] refugee and logistics center if the refugees move

into this direction,” he wrote. “Everyone is ready to assist. However, all this would depend on the fight around Odesa.”

Geychenko added he had a conversation with an “Odesa regional pastor” who confirmed the Odesa Baptist Association of churches will assist if a center is established at the seminary.

Geychenko noted most displaced people seemed to be traveling toward western Ukraine or Moldova, and local churches were organizing to minister “in the context of war.”

In a Feb. 24 conference call involving 75 ministry partners globally, leaders of the Baptist Union of Ukraine and the European Baptist Federation [discussed plans](#) to establish “centers of hope” in each of the nation’s six westernmost regions to shelter displaced families and individuals. They also are coordinating efforts to mobilize churches along evacuation routes to provide care for displaced people.

At the time he wrote, Geychenko reported Odesa seemed to be “calm and controlled.”

“It seems that the major efforts are directed to the capital city of Ukraine. A number of my friends who live at the outskirts of Kyiv are reporting serious fights around,” he wrote.

“The office of the Ukrainian Union of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptist has evacuated today. The situation is changing every hour. So, it is hard to say what it would look like tonight.”

Providing humanitarian aid

The European Baptist Federation, working with the Baptist World Alliance, is providing humanitarian aid to the region.

Texas Baptist Men—a ministry partner of BWA—committed to send “a significant amount of funds to Christians in the region,” TBM Executive Director Mickey Lenamon said in a Feb. 25 email.

Funds will be used to provide food and water for displaced families and individuals, as well as clothing “for those who left their homes quickly with very little,” Lenamon said.

Along with other Baptist leaders, he urged Texas Baptists to pray for the people of Ukraine, for world leaders who are making “crucial decisions,” and for Christian leaders in nations surrounding Ukraine, as they respond to refugees fleeing violence.

To contribute to TBM relief to Ukraine, [click here](#). To donate directly to BWA, [click here](#).