

British Christians urge wide welcome of Ukrainian refugees

March 16, 2022

An ecumenical group of 52 member bodies in England, including the Baptist Union of Great Britain, urged the United Kingdom and other European nations to follow the lead of Ukraine's immediate neighbors in welcoming refugees from that besieged nation.



Half of the 3 million people who have fled from Ukraine since Feb. 24 are children. The Washington Post reports that means one child has become a refugee every second since the start of the war. This child is seen at a temporary shelter and the reception point organized in the sports hall of Hutnik Krakow City Stadium in Krakow, Poland. (Photo by Beata Zawrzcel/NurPhoto via AP)

Noting that “Jesus himself was a child refugee” when his parents fled their home to escape Herod’s slaughter of infants, the group called on churches

to “offer welcome, homes and compassion to those who have fled war.”

Leaders of Churches Together in England issued [a statement on Ukraine](#) March 15 calling for “the immediate cessation of hostilities, the withdrawal of invading forces and the observance of the Geneva Conventions.”

“In this holy season of Lent, we call upon churches everywhere to campaign for an immediate end to the war in Ukraine, and to proclaim the dignity of every human life, whatever its nationality,” the organization’s presidents stated.

Leaders of the group issued the statement during the Churches Together in England Forum, held March 14-16 at The Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick.

“We welcome and commend the extraordinary efforts of countries neighboring Ukraine in receiving refugees from the war and call on the UK and the whole of Europe to follow their example. We support every measure to protect the most vulnerable,” the statement reads.

“We commit ourselves to pray for the nations of Russia and Ukraine, our own government and people, and for all who find themselves refugees, or bereaved, wounded or destitute. May Christ have mercy upon our world.”

The day after the leadership group issued its statement, delegates to the forum called on the United Kingdom government to develop programs of refuge “that are just and effective” for individuals fleeing from violence in Ukraine.

“We welcome changes recently announced to a complex and slow visa application system, thus easing the ways in which Ukrainian refugees can be given sanctuary, and urge the swiftest implementation of this system,” the delegates’ [statement](#) reads.

Need for 'fair sharing of this burden'

The delegates' statement acknowledges "the huge challenges facing those countries bordering Ukraine, in which refugees first arrive, and call for a fair sharing of this burden throughout Europe."

At the same time, representatives of the churches stated: "We deplore the discrimination against African and Asian people and those of religious minorities fleeing Ukraine, and call for every nation receiving refugees to treat all with equal care and dignity. We also recognize, with shame, the slowness to welcome Afghan refugees who are already in Britain, often remaining housed in bed and breakfast accommodation."

Delegates offered their prayers that "Britain might become a society where strangers find a welcome, whatever their origin."

Forum delegates went on to emphasize the responsibility of faith communities in responding to the crisis.

"We embrace the role churches can play as communities of faith offering welcome, homes and compassion to those who have fled war, and encourage churches to take up opportunities to sponsor refugee families," the delegates stated.

"Jesus himself was a child refugee, and in the stranger we can recognize Christ coming amongst us," the statement continues. "The churches should act with compassion, but they can also pray, and just as we have committed ourselves to pray for peace and for the victims of war, we also pray for those who are refugees and for those housing and caring for them."

Regular air raid alarms

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported March 15 [more than 3 million refugees](#) have fled Ukraine since Feb. 24, and an estimated [2 million have been internally displaced](#) within the nation's borders.

Oleksandr Geychenko, president of Odesa Theological Seminary, is among the internally displaced. Geychenko reported he and his family relocated from the port city of Odesa to a town in the western part of Ukraine.

"We do have regular air raid alarms but, thank God, no blasts or missiles yet," he wrote in a March 15 email.

Geychenko also said his "friends in Odesa are safe so far."

While the community where Geychenko and his family currently are living is not in imminent danger, it is affected by the influx of displaced people from eastern Ukraine, he stated.

"The town we are in is overcrowded with refugees," he wrote. He noted the local Baptist church is housing more than 60 displaced people "from different corners of the country."

Texas Baptists help support refugee relief



TBM is supporting a church-based shelter in Lviv, Ukraine, and at least four others in Poland at Chelm, Warsaw, Zelow and Bialystok, along with other locations that cannot be published due to security reasons. (TBM Photo / John Hall)

Texas Baptist Men has committed \$300,000 in response to the crisis in Ukraine and surrounding countries. TBM is supporting a church-based shelter in Lviv, Ukraine, and at least four others in Poland at Chelm, Warsaw, Zelow and Bialystok, along with other locations that cannot be published due to security reasons.

Prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Texas Baptist Hunger Offering included an \$8,000 allocation for a hunger project in Kyiv.

After the Feb. 24 assault on Ukraine, Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission representatives joined the Baptist World Alliance in a coordinated effort to funnel resources to Baptist churches in Ukraine and neighboring countries for humanitarian aid.

The CLC doubled its funding promise to \$16,000 in immediate relief and pledged to give \$20,000 in future hunger relief projects.

The CLC also created a [web page](#) that enables individuals to contribute online to Ukrainian support and relief. The commission reported \$54,000 in online donations as of March 14.

To contribute to TBM relief for Ukrainian refugees and displaced people, [click here](#). To donate directly to BWA, [click here](#).