

# Polish Christians caring for refugees ‘take Jesus seriously’

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CHELM, Poland—With little more than the clothes on their backs, hundreds of Ukrainian women and children wait hours in line to cross into Poland as part of the largest movement of people in Europe since World War II. They shuffle their feet quietly, even apprehensively, toward an unknown future in an unfamiliar country.



At a warehouse in Chelm, donations for Ukrainians are coming in as fast as they are going out to Ukraine and to shelters across Poland. (TBM Photo / John Hall)

They're stunned when they arrive. Volunteers have taped Ukrainian flags in their car windows and signs in Ukrainian reading "free rides to shelter."

Drivers take the refugees to the Baptist church in Chelm, only a few

kilometers up the road where people from around the world—Poland, Latvia, England, the United States, among others—offer a place of safety and security for a few hours, few days or as long as they need it.

Families sit in stunned silence in an impromptu reception area where church volunteers tell the refugees the church has free food, drinks, showers and places where they can sleep.

The congregation even set up children's areas where youngsters can play with bubbles or watch educational videos projected on a screen.

## **'A movement of love and generosity'**

"What we're seeing is a movement of love and generosity across this nation. Poles are opening their doors and arms to Ukrainians. They are taking them into their churches. They are taking them into their homes. They are feeding them. They are caring for them," said Marek Glodek, president of the Baptist Union of Poland.

"This is what Jesus calls his believers to do all the time. Polish Christians are taking the teachings of Jesus seriously and living them out each day during this situation."

More than 60 percent of the 110 Baptist churches in Poland are responding to the needs of Ukrainian refugees, many of them in dramatic ways.

At a warehouse in Chelm, donations for Ukrainians are coming in as fast as they are going out to Ukraine and to shelters across Poland. The deliveries continue, even after Russia intensifies attacks on the western portion of Ukraine.

In north Poland, church members installed new insulation, air conditioning, heating, electrical lines and beds in an old summer camp to revitalize it to house refugees. Before the work was complete, they were housing 46

Ukrainians—all from one family. Now it can house 60 more.

## **‘It’s the right thing to do’**

The work is difficult, but it must be done, volunteers insist.

“You just do it because it’s the right thing to do,” said Lukas, who is leading the camp effort.

Near the Belarus border, a church is providing shelter for about 50 people and sending supplies into Ukraine, despite increased Russian aggression. The effort is led in part by Natasha and Sergei, Ukrainians who came to Poland 10 years ago.

“We didn’t know why we were moving,” Sergei said. “We knew it couldn’t just be about money. Now we know.”



Natasha calls her parents in Ukraine every morning to make sure they are still alive. Then she gets to work helping people just like them. She helps lead a TBM-sponsored shelter in Bialystok, Poland, for about 100 people. She assists the church as it collects

items and drives into Ukraine to deliver them. (TBM Photo)

Natasha calls her parents who remain in Ukraine twice a day to find out if they're still alive. After hearing their voices for a little while, she goes to work helping her countrymen. Between collecting and organizing supplies and registering people in the shelter, she moves quickly and calmly throughout the day.

"I see dread in their faces. I see their pain. I see tears in their eyes. I see the fear for their family they left behind. But I also see how much they feel secure here. When I hug them, they shiver with the happiness of being safe," she said.

"I feel like I've done so, so little. I could have done so much more. But I try to do everything so they know we've done everything we can."

While Baptists in Poland, Romania, Hungary and Moldova take center stage in hands-on ministry, Baptists from around the world are playing supportive roles by donating supplies, providing additional funding, praying and volunteering. People speak English, Latvian, Russian, Polish, Icelandic, Ukrainian and other languages in the shelter.

## **TBM supporting five shelters for six months**

Texas Baptist Men has committed \$300,000 throughout the region to Ukrainian, Polish and Romanian Baptists, enough to support five shelters for six months. TBM has a team in Poland and is sending larger volunteer teams to serve in the Chelm church shelter near the Ukraine border.

"More than 1.5 million Ukrainians have sought safety in Poland," said

Mickey Lenamon, TBM executive director and CEO. “Baptists worldwide have joined together to meet their needs.

“TBM is honored to be part of that, whether it is through funding, sorting and loading donations in country, setting up beds, or even doing the little things that are needed like cleaning floors and toilets. We see what believers throughout the region are doing and are seeking to do likewise—follow Christ daily and share his love.”

The crisis will have a long-lasting impact in the region. Families are divided as fathers and brothers fight for their country. Many Ukrainians wonder if they will ever return home or if there is anything to return to.

Until they decide, Baptists across Poland are providing a place for them.

“The faces of Ukrainians arriving in Poland have the look of total despair. But I see the love of God poured out by the Polish people and see hope and comfort shining through,” said Gary Finley, part of a TBM team serving in Poland.

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