

# Polish church provides ongoing help to Ukrainian refugees

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Second Baptist Church in Gdańsk, Poland, has helped meet the needs of more than 100 refugees from Ukraine in the past 11 months—without the benefit of its own building but with financial assistance from missions partners such as First Baptist Church in Temple.

Over the past two decades, Second Baptist Church has met for worship in a variety of increasingly larger rented venues as its membership has grown to about 150 worshippers on a typical Sunday. Eight out of 10 people in the church are first-generation evangelical Christians.

“We base the life of our church on small groups, mostly meeting in homes,” said Pastor Adrian Strózek, who at age 50 is the senior member of the young congregation.



Members of Second Baptist Church in Gdańsk, Poland, host a refugee family from Ukraine.

When Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24 last year, some young families in

Second Baptist Church opened their homes to women and children who fled eastern Ukraine.

“One family who had a house took in seven from Ukraine,” he said.

The first families to offer short-term housing to refugees were Ukrainian-born church members who relocated to Poland after Russia invaded and subsequently annexed Crimea in 2014.

“The apartments are really small. So, it usually meant people had to sleep on the floor,” Strózek said. “That may be all right for a few days or a week, but not for long.”

When it became clear the need for housing was going to extend for months, the church rented three apartments and a house for the Ukrainian refugees.

## **Meeting needs of neighbors from Ukraine**

“We have provided for the needs of our Ukrainian brothers and sisters—material, emotional and spiritual,” Strózek said.

In addition to housing, Second Baptist Church provides the refugees food, medicine, assistance in finding employment and help in learning the Polish language. Second Baptist also partners with a church in Lutsk that helps internally displaced people in Ukraine.

Members of Second Baptist have helped mothers walk through the process of securing the necessary documents to enroll their children in school. They also have walked alongside the women through periods of long separation from their husbands, who are required to stay in Ukraine.

“One woman’s husband was in Mariupol, where he was taken prisoner by the Russian army,” Strózek said. “She lost touch with him for weeks. Finally, the Red Cross was allowed limited access. He had been injured, but he survived.”

## **Missions partnership with Temple congregation**

First Baptist Church in Temple established a relationship with Second Baptist Church in Gdańsk several years ago.

Initially, Evan Duncan—at that time the teaching and communications pastor in Temple and now senior pastor of a church in West Chester, Penn.—led small volunteer groups from Central Texas who were permitted to visit Gdańsk schools to help students practice conversational Spanish.

Later, mission groups from the First Baptist Church led summer camps for children and youth in Poland.

So, when First Baptist in Temple learned about how the Gdańsk church was caring for refugees, members wanted to help support that ministry financially.

“The work they are doing is just phenomenal,” said Josh Flores Olvera, missions minister at First Baptist in Temple. “It’s a nonstop, hard-working ministry ... and they are doing it all without a centralized facility.”

## **‘We are preparing for the future’**



A conceptual drawing depicts the new building that Second Baptist Church in Gdańsk, Poland, is constructing.

But that will change. Second Baptist Church is in the process of constructing a building strategically located within walking distance of a major university in Gdańsk. The worship center will seat more than 250, and the building will include space for ministries to refugees.

“They need to learn the Polish language to be self-sufficient. They need to form new relationships in a foreign country,” Strózek said. “They will need help with their children and teens. Right now, most of the refugees are single mothers with children.

“To some extent, they are starting over. We want to meet them in this situation. And we want our new church building to serve in this sensitive ministry.”

The church also hopes to offer a Christian counseling center at its new building and provide a safe place for teenagers to gather.

“To make all this possible, we need our new church to be self-sustaining,” Strózek said. “We want to buy and install solar panels and an internal heat pump to limit energy costs.”

Next month, Strózek will travel to Texas to meet with potential financial

supporters and missions partners in the Temple area.

“The war is far from over, and we are preparing for the future,” he said.

“We want to be prepared for the new needs.”

*For more information about the ministries of Second Baptist Church in Gdańsk, Poland, contact Pastor Adrian Strózek at [adrian.strozek73@gmail.com](mailto:adrian.strozek73@gmail.com).*