

Ukraine women crochet angel ornaments to thank donors

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ODESSA, Ukraine (BP)—Light is scarce during scheduled electrical outages as Ukraine suffers a bombed-out power grid. Yet, women there are using their light this Christmas to crochet angel ornaments to send churches and other supporters in the United States.

“Now it’s difficult because cities stay without light sometimes 24 hours, sometimes more,” said Tanya Pyzh, daughter-in-law of Ukrainian Baptist Theological Seminary President Yaroslav “Slavik” Pyzh.

“It’s before Christmas, a really special time, and now they don’t have light. It’s like two or three hours a day they have light. And they’re working in those two or three hours because they need to see those small details,” Tanya said. “It’s precious. All of them were really ready and thankful to do this, because it means a lot. Right now, it means a lot.”

As many as 20 women near Odessa, in Lviv and a few other Ukrainian cities are paid a small fee to make the ornaments through a partnership of the Baptist seminary in Lviv and the Ukrainian Partnership Foundation in Chesterfield, Mo., said Penny Iannacone, donor engagement director of the partnership foundation.

The small fee supplements the income of women in Ukraine struggling to provide for their families during the war’s high inflation rate, with some of the women donating their earnings to the Ukrainian war effort, Iannacone said.

“The war’s probably been the hardest on the family, and because a man can be called to war if they’re between the ages of 18 to 60, a lot of the women

have been left without the man in the home,” Iannacone said.

“I’m sure this has been a blessing for those ladies to not only have a little project to work on, but also to be able to earn a little money for however they used it, whether for their personal need or whether they donated it back to the war effort.”

Ukrainian Baptist Theological Seminary ships the ornaments to the foundation, which in turn distributes them with thank you cards to top givers among U.S. churches, individuals and groups. The Ukrainian Partnership Foundation will display and distribute ornaments at a Woman’s Missionary Union conference in January.

Send Relief, the Southern Baptist humanitarian program, has supported the Ukrainian Partnership Foundation through grants. Additionally, Send Relief’s humanitarian aid to Ukraine topped \$10 million in the first three months of the war.

“They’re very popular. I’ve had several people ask if they could purchase them to give as Christmas gifts. We don’t have an endless supply,” Iannacone said of the ornaments. “We’ve asked (the women in Ukraine) to produce as many as possible during the next month, and they told us they thought they could get us 1,600 more.”

Each ornament is crafted with yarn in Ukraine’s national colors of blue and yellow and takes about two hours to crochet. The Ukrainian Partnership Foundation is not charging recipients for the ornaments, Iannacone said.

First Baptist Church in Nashville, Tenn., is among a handful of congregations that each received about 50 of the ornaments, Iannacone said.

‘Will be a treasured keepsake’

For Nashville First’s children, the ornaments are a reminder of the angel’s encouragement in Luke 2:10 to “fear not,” Nashville First Minister to Children Shannon Meadors said.

“Our children were overwhelmed that the women of Ukraine would send them a gift. With wide eyes, they held onto their angel ornaments so carefully, commenting on their beauty,” Meadors said.

“As parents arrived, the kids were so excited to show and tell all about their special gift.

“These handmade angel ornaments will be a treasured keepsake on their Christmas trees for years to come reminding our families of the strong people of Ukraine.”

The Ukrainian Partnership Foundation decided to ask the women of Ukraine to make the ornaments after Tanya’s mother purchased a couple at a humanitarian fundraising event near Odessa in August. Tanya lives in Missouri with her husband “Slavik,” the son of Ukrainian Baptist Theological Seminary President Slavik Pyzh.

“At this gathering, they had one lady who was doing those ornaments,” Tanya said. “And my mom bought some as a present to me and to give money to the army.”

Tanya in turn gifted an angel to Ukrainian Partnership Foundation President W. Joseph Privott, who gave Tanya and her husband a place to stay as they transitioned to St. Louis, Mo.

Privott conceived the continuing exchange to not only thank donors, but also help support Ukrainian families during the war. The nonprofit Ukrainian Partnership Foundation has supported Christian education in

Ukraine, mainly through the Baptist seminary, since 2006.

Tanya's mother recruited additional women to crochet the ornaments, creating a community among strangers now unified in the effort. Ukrainian Baptist Theological Seminary collects the ornaments and pays the women from donations the Ukrainian Partnership Foundation sends from donors.

The women appreciate the help, Tanya said.

"They're just really excited about it, that somebody's caring about them, and somebody wants to help them so they can help somebody else," Tanya said. "It's kind of like a win-win for everybody."