

Ukrainian Baptists seek prayer and support

March 15, 2024

More than two years after Russia's intensified assault on Ukraine began, Ukrainian Baptists appealed to "brothers and sisters in Christ in the United States" for prayer and support.

The board of the All-Ukrainian Union of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists sent a letter dated March 9 to leaders of Baptist groups based in the United States, including the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist World Alliance. The letter requests a show of solidarity as "a testament to the bond that unites us in Christ."

"In these times of unprecedented challenge, as Russia has launched and continues to wage a bloody war against Ukraine, we, the All-Ukrainian Union of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists, reach out to our brothers and sisters in the United States with a plea for support and prayer," the letter stated.

Assaults on Baptist and evangelical churches in Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine reveal a "strategy of cultural and spiritual genocide," the letter asserted.



Elijah Brown (left), general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, and Igor Bandura, vice president of the Baptist Union of Ukraine, stand behind a pulpit made from a missile shot down over Ukraine. (Photo from Twitter)

The letter—distributed by Igor Bandura, vice president of the Baptist Union in Ukraine—specifically noted the [deaths of the daughter and grandson of a Baptist pastor](#) in Odesa resulting from a March 2 Russian drone attack that claimed 12 lives.

It also mentioned a Feb. 28 guided bomb airstrike on Kupiansk which hit an evangelical church and killed Pastor Yuriy Klimko.

“Known not only for his pastoral work, but also as a volunteer in the city of Kupiansk, Pastor Klimko led a church that served as both a spiritual haven and a volunteer hub,” the letter stated. “The attack on the church was no accident; it is highly probable that the Russians were deliberately targeting the building.”

The letter disputes Russia’s claims that it is seeking to protect Christian civilians in Ukraine from harm.

“Their drones and rockets continue to take the lives of peaceful Christians,” it states.

Infringement of religious liberty

The letter from Ukrainian Baptists particularly noted the “deliberate and systematic infringement” of religious liberty in Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine.

“In March 2023, the Russian occupiers demolished the church building of Evangelical Christian Baptists in Iziium, Kharkiv region,” it stated.

The letter also noted Russian military forcibly closed two Baptist churches in Berdyansk, in Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhia region, and a Baptist church in Chkalove, in the Melitopol district.

“This pattern of religious persecution and eradication of Baptist communities underscores a broader strategy of cultural and spiritual genocide,” it stated.

The letter noted as early as 2018, groups financed by the Russian Federation accused Ukrainian Baptists of being an “extremist religious organization” conducting “destructive” activities.

Appeal for solidarity

“In this hour of need, we turn to you for solidarity,” the letter to U.S.-based Baptists stated. “We ask you to join us in prayer for comfort for grieving families and for peace in our land. We believe in the strength and compassion of the Evangelical Christian community in the United States.”

The letter specifically asked leaders of the SBC, the National Baptist Convention, the American Baptist Churches USA and member bodies of the

BWA to “raise awareness within your congregations and across denominations.”

“Your prayers and voices are powerful,” the letter concluded. “May our shared commitment to Christ’s teachings of love and peace guide us through this dark period. May God bless you for your kindness and solidarity.

“We hold fast to the hope that, together in prayer and action, we can navigate these dark times towards a future filled with light and peace.”

‘Stand with those who are mistreated’

One of the recipients of the letter—BWA General Secretary Elijah Brown—affirmed its recognition of Christian unity and its call for prayer.

“The Bible is clear—there is not a suffering church and a nonsuffering church, but we are one church in Jesus Christ. Let our hearts break anew for the families of our brothers and sisters who have needlessly died in an unjust invasion,” Brown said.

“The Baptist World Alliance joins with the Baptist Union of Ukraine in encouraging every Baptist to renew their prayers, raise their voice on behalf of those facing persecution, and live as ambassadors of just peace.

“In places where the weapons of war are working to dismantle the sounds of worship, may Baptists model generosity and courage and stand with those who are mistreated as if we ourselves are suffering.”

SBC President Bart Barber also received the letter. He repounded: “Southern Baptists condemn these acts of war by the Russian Federation against the sovereign nation of Ukraine. We call upon Vladimir Putin to withdraw his forces from Ukraine and end this war of aggression. We stand in solidarity with our Ukrainian brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as

with those Russian brothers and sisters who have courageously opposed this war.

“Southern Baptists have provided comfort to affected Ukrainians from the beginning of this war through the International Mission Board and SendRelief. Even as we watch others falter, we will be faithful friends to Ukrainian Baptists.”

EDITOR'S NOTE: The last two paragraphs were added after the article originally were posted.