

War destroys Ukraine school's campus but not its mission

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Based on his experience in Ukraine, Valentyn Syniy believes Christians cannot experience war and emerge unchanged.

“War burns out hypocrisy and formalism,” said Syniy, president of Tavriski Christian Institute in Ukraine. “War reveals at the same time that we are stronger than we think and weaker than we think.”

Conflict in Ukraine began in February 2014 with Russia's annexation of Crimea and intensified dramatically with the full-fledged invasion by Russia in February 2022.

Throughout the ongoing war, Ukrainian Christians have demonstrated great resilience, but also have learned how lives are “easily broken,” Syniy observed.

In the case of Tavriski Christian Institute, warfare devastated the school's campus in Kherson but could not destroy its mission to prepare the next generation of the nation's Christian leaders.

Syniy journeyed to the United States in early June to let American Christians know about the institute's needs and its emerging opportunities. After a brief visit in Boston, he arrived in Dallas to attend events involving the International Mission Board and North American Mission Board during the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting.

Ransacked, repurposed and ultimately shelled

Before Russia occupied Kherson on March 1, 2022, leaders of Tavriski Christian Institute already had plans in place to evacuate and relocate students to western Ukraine.



Russian troops occupied the campus of Tavriski Christian Institute in Kherson on March 10, 2022, ransacking and looting the buildings. Later, the buildings were shelled. (Courtesy Photo)

On March 10, Russian troops took over the institute's five buildings and 15-acre campus, repurposing its facilities as a military training base, barracks and hospital.

"A neighbor who lived near the campus told us the Russian Army brought in a mobile crematorium to dispose of the bodies of the dead," Syniy said.

Russian soldiers looted and ransacked the institute's buildings, destroying the contents of its 30,000-volume library.

Once the Ukrainian Army liberated Kherson in November, the campus was returned to the institute.

However, leaders and staff found three of the buildings had been destroyed by shelling in late August—the institute’s office, the library and one of the dormitories. In the months that followed, the remaining two building also were destroyed.

Institute continued its work

During the time the campus was occupied by Russian troops, Tavriski Christian Institute carried on its work in rented space in Ivano-Frankivsk, 540 miles to the northwest.

That work included providing relief and assisting in the relocation of internally displaced people. The institute gathered and distributed more than 180 tons of food and other humanitarian aid in nine months.

The institute also replaced about 120 windows in homes where the glass had been blown out by blasts. In doing so, they helped depressed and despondent families who had been living for months in darkness behind boarded up windows move into the light, Syniy noted.

In partnership with the Baptist Union of Ukraine, the institute is launching a new degree program—the nation’s first licensed master’s degree in chaplaincy and conflict resolution.

“People have experienced trauma,” Syniy said. “We want to prepare pastors for a new ministry. There are many new needs and many new challenges.”

Seeking to secure permanent home

One of the key challenges Tavriski Christian Institute faces is securing a permanent home and rebuilding its library with at least 2,000 square meters of study space to meet government licensure standards.

When Lincoln Christian University in Illinois closed, the school donated its library of more than 25,000 books to Tavriski Christian Institute. Now the institute is seeking a partner to translate some of the key English-language theological books into the Ukrainian language.

Leaders of the institute envision the new library in Kyiv serving as a community center for churches and church leaders, as well as a training center offering workshops and seminars.

After an extended time in Ivano-Frankivsk, leaders of the institute want to purchase a facility in Kyiv. The school currently is renting the building in Kyiv from Light in the East, a ministry based in Germany. Estimated cost to purchase and repurpose the property is \$4 million.

Ukraine needs theologically trained church leaders

Syniy is seeking partners to help secure the property in Kyiv and renovate the facility to provide a theological library, classrooms, dormitories and worship space.

Ukraine needs theologically trained Christian leaders now more than ever, he noted.

“In war, some people lose their faith,” he observed. “They ask, ‘Where is God in all of this?’”

Syniy believes Christians in Ukraine will emerge from war with a faith strengthened by wrestling with hard questions—a faith shaped by new understandings about the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of God.

“We want to prepare pastors for the new reality in Ukraine,” Syniy said.

For more information about Tavriski Christian Institute and its plans for the future, email partnerstci@gmail.com or [click here](#).