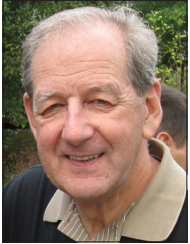


BEACON *of* HOPE

REPORT OF THE WORK OF THE MENNONITE FAMILY CENTRE, ZAPORIZHZHYA, UKRAINE



by Louie Sawatzky
Project Director

Greetings again from the Mennonite Benevolent Society of Winnipeg, and the Mennonite Family Centre in Zaporizhzhya, Ukraine. We wish you Peace and Joy this Christmas season, as we prepare to celebrate again, the birth of the Son of God.

The prophet Isaiah calls the people of Judah to repentance and faithfulness, and sees in a vision of the latter days, a time when people will again gather to worship, and will “beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war any more”. (Isaiah 2:4).

Ukraine is in a time of war. The people of Ukraine can only hope and trust the time will come when peace is restored, and what is broken can be rebuilt, and implements of war can be destroyed and converted to life giving tools. We pray and trust the time will come, when they will again gather to worship and celebrate Jesus birth in peace and safety.

THE WAR

War is awful. It pits people against people, it tears families apart, it separates children from parents, it destroys homes and dreams and possibilities. Instead of love, it fosters hate and resentments that will take generations to repair. So it is in Ukraine. Millions of people have been displaced and many have died on both sides of this conflict. There are so many victims of war. Many atrocities committed are too brutal to retell. It is estimated that over 10 million people have left their homes for safety outside of the country, and many more millions have left their homes within the country, hoping to return. In some areas rubble is all that remains, mingled with lost hopes and dreams and lost lives. Bombs and missiles are still falling on many villages, towns and cities. In Russian controlled areas, many children and adults have been forcibly evacuated to Russia. There are areas without electric power, or frequent power outages. There are areas without heat or water. Most goods are still available, but many are two or three times the usual price.

Although the city of Zaporizhzhya has been hit with bombs and missiles on many occasions, it has not been hit as hard as many other cities. I have been able to speak with Boris Letkeman almost every day. Many nights he and Maria, his wife have spent hours in the root cellar as air raid sirens warn of incoming missiles. There has been significant property damage both in the city, and even more so in surrounding villages from the air war. Ground forces have not entered the city, and for the first seven months, the city represented a safe haven for many people further east. That changed dramatically in October, when so many people felt threatened, and were encouraged by the Government to leave the city for points further west. It is estimated at least 50% of the people have left, leaving behind those unable to leave.

The city did not turn on the central heating system until the second week of November, when temperatures consistently dropped to single digits. There is always the sound of war in the distance.

RESPONSE

We do not participate in the war, or the politics of the two countries. The current war brings back memories of stories told by our parents and others who experienced or were affected by the revolution and the first and second world war, and the hard times that followed. Those conflicts also broke families and communities and resulted in death and destruction and the mass movement of people. We still experience the effects 100 years later. We can identify with the conflicts our forefathers had in reconciling their decisions and actions with their faith. Now as then, we cannot judge those decisions. In all the chaos there is also hope for the future. There is hope peace will return and hope that rebuilding can begin. That families and communities will be together again. We are grateful for the dedicated team of people, the staff of the Centre who make their work their mission. Most of the staff has remained in the city and continues

to provide daily support in the Home Care program for about 120 people and the Respite Program, which has 6 beds available for those who need 24 hour care. We continue to provide over 3000 hours of care each month in the Home Care program. The Day Program provides support for about 40 people, mostly widows, for whom we provide transportation to come to the Centre one day every week. This is life giving for them. We have had to close this program temporarily several times for safety reason.

Mennonite Family Centre in Zaporizhzhya, Ukraine

Our Mission:

To develop and initiate delivery of health and social services programs, based on Christian values from a Mennonite perspective, in the Zaporizhzhya community:

- for needy individuals with a primary focus on the elderly,
- that train service providers and caregivers, and
- that demonstrate and promote the principles of volunteerism, sustainability and a civil society.

Published by
The Mennonite Benevolent Society
(Manitoba)

Layout and printing by



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We believe we have an important role for these many people. There is trauma all around us, as people live in constant fear and hardship. We believe we can be a stable presence as we support our clients, and are a witness in the community. We do not have trauma counselors on staff, but just being there, providing food and support and a place for people to gather goes a long way. Winter is coming, and no one knows the hardships that await. We don't know how or when this will end but we trust it will end, beginning a new phase. We will make decisions as to how our programs must change, as conditions change.

The first shipment of clothes and blankets sent in September and October have arrived. These clothes were collected at Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. We shipped 1,300lbs of clothing and blankets to be distributed to clients through the workers at the Centre.

The strength and resilience of the people is amazing. As soon as the bombing stops, they first respond to the immediate needs and then begin the cleanup. Outwardly there is no panic, but Boris says often sleep does not come and people are so weary of the constant stress. We also know resentment has been building. Reconciliation with the Russian people will take generations. Reconciliation with neighbors, or maybe even family members who have been supportive to the invaders will also take a long time and will also never be forgotten. Besides our own programs, the Centre supports three programs run by local groups. This includes "the Florence Centre" and "Prometheus" both working with children with special needs, and "the House of Mercy", a care home for widows still being run in the Russian occupied area of Katusovka. All have had to make changes due to the war.

These are pictures of various people receiving food bags delivered from the Centre. Besides clients in our regular programs, we also support others who we become aware of, in need. Some are refugees that have come to Zaporizhzhya, while others are long term residents.



Support for the Mennonite Family Centre

We invite you to support this ministry in Ukraine. If you have recently made a donation, on behalf of our Board and the many clients, we thank you. We know many of you have supported this ministry for a long time, and we thank you for the ongoing support.

If you are new to this ministry, we invite you to be part of this response. If you cannot or choose not to, we understand, and send this Newsletter as information, and ask you to share the information or pass it on to those who may be interested.

**We wish you special blessings this Christmas holiday season.
May the spirit of Christmas and all that it means, stay with us all year.**



(Cut and submit, or simply send your cheque in the envelope enclosed)

Yes, I want to help the needy in Ukraine! Use where most needed.

Name: _____ Amount: \$ _____

Address: _____ City: _____

Prov/State: _____ Postal/Zip code: _____

*Please note: Donations from the US are administered in Winnipeg, Canada.
Receipts are issued by the Mennonite Family Centre (USA) Inc.*

In Canada, make cheques payable and send to:
The Mennonite Benevolent Society
Ukraine Ministry
1045 Concordia Ave.
Winnipeg, MB R2K 3S7
Registered charity # 119244952 RR0001

In the USA, make checks payable and send to:
The Mennonite Family Centre (USA) Inc.
Ukraine Ministry
1045 Concordia Ave.
Winnipeg, MB R2K 3S7
Registered charity # 83-0361680

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