

# BEACON of HOPE

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



by Louie Sawatzky  
Project Director

Life carries on for the people of Zaporozhye as we again prepare for the Christmas season. The daily sounds of war cannot extinguish the hope in people's hearts that the war will come to an end. But how long must they wait? The

Prophets and the people asked the same question many years ago, as they waited for the Messiah. We are told, when the time was fulfilled, God sent His Son... Galatians 4:4. We are reminded over and over again, that God's time is not our time.

Boris Letkeman, the Director of the Mennonite Family Centre, says it is in God's hands, and we must wait and pray.

Christmas will be celebrated on December 25th in most places in Ukraine this year. In the midst of war, hope is eternal, and the coming of Christ will be remembered and celebrated as they are able as they long for peace on earth, and peace in their hearts.

I will briefly report on several aspects of the war as it affects the people of Zaporozhye and the work in Ukraine. As of this writing, it is day 988 of the war. It is estimated over 1 million soldiers and thousands of civilians including children, have lost their lives on both sides of the conflict. Countless families have been disrupted and many facilities have been destroyed. In terms of area, about 25% of the country is in the hands of the occupiers, but the air war has no border limits. There are several front lines in the ground war, and there are constant attempts made by Russian forces to move those lines. In the past two months, Russian forces have made significant advances on the eastern front line.

The city of Zaporozhye is about 40 kms from the southern front line, and the sounds of war are constant in the city. Air raid sirens are a daily occurrence, as some people find shelter and others who have been dulled by the repetition of the air raid sirens, try to ignore the warnings. Life is disrupted for everyone. Many people have left the city, and others have arrived from the war zone, and life goes on.

At the Mennonite Family Centre, they have experienced a bomb exploding close enough to shatter the windows of the balconies, and other windows have cracked, but the Centre has not been badly damaged or destroyed. The team of Home Care workers continue the daily care of clients assigned to them. The number of clients continues to grow, as does the need for food. There is no shortage of food in the markets, but prices have again increased as have many other costs, while the meager pensions received by seniors have not. The basic pension for a senior covers the cost of heat and electricity. Boris says, he often encounters older people in the market place asking for food. He says there is a feeling of unity as people help each other, even when they are all just trying to cope.

And so, the work of the Centre carries on and is even more important than ever. The mission of the Centre is to meet the people in their hour of need, either through the Home Care program, the Respite Centre, the Children's programs, or in response to people who are hungry. Through this work, we believe we are being faithful to what God has called us to. None of the staff or clients have suffered physical harm. We are grateful to God for continued protection and guidance.

### Administration of the Mennonite Family Centre

Boris Letkeman continues as Local Director of the Centre on a half time position. He has many years of experience, joining the Centre right at the beginning in 2002. Boris oversees all activities of the Centre. Working with him is Sergey Butyrin, the Assistant Director, and Nadia and Tanya, as Program Coordinators. They provide direction to all activities and staff to ensure they are trained and matched with clients. They make many client visits, and respond to all requests for help. They model the Christian response to the needs of clients and staff in time of war, even when they themselves also find shelter during the air raid sirens and bombing. They show courage and resilience as they overcome fear and focus on the work at hand once the sirens go silent. Tanya says she has 3 minutes from the time of the first warning to the time a bomb arrives, to run to a shelter in a nearby school. Many cannot do so, so they try to keep two walls between themselves and the outside. That means they stay in the corridor.

### Home Care Providers

It has been difficult to hire Home Care providers, because many businesses are looking for employees. So many men are in the war, that women fill the roles often taken by men. There are 23 Home Care providers at the Mennonite Family Centre. They come from different backgrounds and experiences. Tanya Timoshenko, the Assistant Program Coordinator, reports they have hired several new care providers. She has profiled one of the new workers.

Her name is Tatyana Benyuk. She is 46 years old and began work in September. She was born and raised in the Kherson area, which is now under Russian control. She was married there, and she and her husband have two sons, who are now adults and had left earlier to find work in Poland. Tatyana and her husband operated a small farm for 10 years, and then made a change to go into the tourist business on the shores of the Sea of Azov, opening a mini-hotel for tourists on vacation. Their normal life ended in February 2022, when occupying forces came and occupied the city. For a year, they tried to live in this occupied city but found this too difficult. They were able to leave everything behind and come to Zaporozhye for a new beginning. They are now considered "internally displaced people"





(IDP's), and are trying to start new. Tatyana heard about the Centre, and that it is possible to help people who are in similar or worse situations than they found themselves in. Despite everything, she and her husband have not lost hope that the war will end and hope they will be able to return to their hometown.

## The Respite Program

The very modest Respite program located in the apartments next to the office apartment has only 6 beds, but all are filled with widows who have no other place to be. They receive excellent care from several workers from the local Pentecostal congregation. Shown on the picture are three of the Respite clients along with Boris Letkeman. They have just received new blankets and are modelling them. In fall, as the weather turns cold, the City's central heating system is not activated until the outside temperatures go below zero. Most of the apartments in the city including our office, get very cold by that time so we provide heat from electric heaters at the Centre, as long as electric power is available.



## Clients



More and more clients are from the occupied regions. Younger families and seniors are still arriving from the villages or towns as the front line of the war approaches. Many are reluctant to leave their home, but as a last resort they come leaving everything behind.

That's how it was with Nikolay and Galina Vasetsky. They were born in 1937 and lived in a village in the Gulyay-Pole district, near the front line. He worked as a tractor driver and she worked with animals. Their children and grandchildren were born there, but life changed when the war came. They lived under occupation for one month but when the constant bombing began, the neighbors took them

into town to stay with the oldest daughter until they could be evacuated to Zaporozhye. They now rent a small apartment, after having lost everything back home. The village was completely destroyed and now exists in name only. The rent is high and the pension is small. They are 87 years old, and cannot go back to work. And now Galina fell and fractured her hip. She has had surgery, and is able to get around the apartment with the aid of a walker. A care worker comes three times a week for three hours and brings a food package.

This is the difficult fate of so many people in Ukraine. To date we have not taken on clients (soldiers) who have fought and been injured in the war. There are so many soldiers who have been injured. They are admitted to the hospital for treatment and although the physical injuries may heal, there are also emotional and mental injuries. The military looks after all the treatment of soldiers.

## Children with Special Needs

We have reported in other Newsletters about the support for children with special needs, through "Prometheus" the special school for these children. The aim of this school is to prepare as many children with special needs as they can, for public school and others, with social and other skills to live a productive life in society. It is a pleasure to again report that the school is flourishing, now having about 175 students. Many are now in regular public-school classes right at their location which is within a former public school that had been closed. They continue to conduct in-person classes and have their own shelter when the air raid sirens come on. It is a tremendous success, and we are proud to be one of the supporting organizations of this school.



## Support for the Mennonite Family Centre

We invite you to be part of the support for the work of the Centre. We ask for prayer support and invite your financial support if you feel called to respond in that way. The work of the Mennonite Family Centre is an ongoing witness and real help to the people within the region of Zaporozhye long after many of our ancestors left this area. It is also an answer to prayer for the many clients in the various programs.



(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.

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