

Ukrainian Pastor: 'This War Will Lead to the End of Communism'

Ukrainian pastor Yan Gutarov woke up around 3 a.m. on Feb. 24. He couldn't go back to sleep, so he began to pray.

At 4:30 a.m., he heard an explosion and he wondered if there had been a gas leak in his neighborhood in the city of Odessa. But another explosion followed, shaking his house. Then he realized the unthinkable had happened: Russian warplanes were bombing his city.

"Six weeks ago we heard that the Russians might invade, but we didn't believe it," Pastor Gutarov told me this week on a Zoom call. He has led the Church of God Odessa, a congregation of 180 people, since it began six years ago. Today, half of his church members have fled for safety in Moldova or Romania, and he and his family traveled to Germany to live temporarily.

Last Sunday, members of Gutarov's church who stayed in Odessa met for prayer and worship, and a leader who stayed behind preached. "Some of our church members don't want to leave," Gutarov said. "They don't know where to go. There is one widow with four children who says she can't go. She has to stay and take care of her small farm with animals."

This is the reality for so many Ukrainian Christians right now. Some have made the difficult trek to the borders of Poland, Moldova or Romania to escape—and in many cases they have had to stand in line for two or three days to find safety. Others have opted to stay home. And many of the younger men (and some women), inspired by the courage of Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelinsky, have taken up arms to defend their country against the invaders.

"Pastor Yan is always on the phone with our church members," says associate pastor Anatoliy Ulyzko, a 46-year-old father of three children who sought shelter in Germany with his pastor. He is helping to coordinate a relief effort to provide funds for food and medicines for those back home, as well as church members who have fled the conflict.

The war in Ukraine is a nightmare of bomb attacks coming from all directions. And yet Ukrainian church leaders like Gutarov and Ulyzko are remarkably positive and full of faith.

"This war will lead to the end of communism," Ulyzko told me with confidence. He believes Russian President Vladimir Putin's brazen attack on Ukraine will end up isolating him and bringing worldwide condemnation of Soviet-style dictatorship. This is how many Ukrainian believers are praying. They believe freedom will prevail over totalitarianism.

"Christians from Ukraine took the gospel to the nations," Ulyzko says. "We have been like seeds, and we will see the fruit of this. We will continue to preach the gospel and we will see spiritual revival all over Europe."

Pastor Gutarov also believes the old, repressive Soviet system is still ingrained in many Russian people, even those who belong to the Russian Orthodox Church. He notes that many Orthodox people don't like evangelical Christians, so they try to hinder the spreading of the gospel. But he also knows there are Christians in Russia who love Jesus, hate communism and care deeply for the Ukrainian people.

"I have many Russian friends who are pastors in Russia," he adds. "Right now they are afraid because they cannot speak the truth about what Putin is doing. They live in a totalitarian system. But Ukraine is a country of free people, and we enjoy the freedom of speech and the freedom of religion."

When I asked the two pastors about their greatest needs, both of them asked that American believers send funds to help the

Ukrainian people—both refugees living in camps and temporary housing in other nations, and those who have chosen to stay behind to face rocket attacks, gunfire and empty store shelves. All money collected will be used for temporary housing, food, medicines and supplies.

“We want this conflict to end quickly,” Pastor Gutarov told me. “But even if it ends tomorrow, we face a humanitarian catastrophe that could last for a year because of the damage done to our cities.”

There are many American churches and ministries sending funds to the front lines of the Ukrainian conflict. You can send tax-deductible donations to The Springs Church of Jacksonville, Florida ([link](#)), Christian Life Worship Center in Chicago ([link](#)) or Vision Church of Jacksonville ([link](#)). To give directly to the Church of God Odessa’s relief efforts, go to [. {eo}](#)

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