

CityServe Partners With Churches on the Front Lines of Ukraine Crisis, Offers Lasting Aid

Editor's Note: This is a developing story. Watch for more Strang Report interviews on the topic of Ukraine, including a possible live interview this week with the CityServe leadership team in Poland.

People of faith know that every crisis represents an opportunity for ministry—and the current Ukraine crisis offers a tremendous one. No one knows this better than CityServe, which is responding to that need by mobilizing Americans to help churches on the front lines in Eastern Europe offer food, emergency medical supplies, refugee housing and more to those affected by the devastating Russian attacks.

“Jesus said, ‘I will build my church, and the gates of hell—and people like Putin, who get their orders from hell—will not prevail,’” CityServe Chairman and CEO Dave Donaldson says in a recent interview with other CityServe leadership on the *Strang Report* podcast right before the team left for Poland.

“We’re going there to support the local churches, those that we have talked to that are worshipping the Lord from behind enemy lines, those that are in the trenches, the front lines in Poland, Romania, and we’re providing food, emergency supplies,” Donaldson says. “We’re helping them with housing for the refugees that are coming over the border, but also making sure people have prayer and emotional support because we believe that the church is God’s infrastructure for hope, help and security.”

CityServe, a church-based organization, works in “equipping, resourcing, mobilizing the local church to bring healing to the brokenness in its community,” Donaldson says. Charisma has previously reported on its work in partnering with families and farmers to assist with food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic, so it comes as no surprise that CityServe, through CityServe Europe, is connecting with churches to meet the dramatic needs there, including the more than 1.5 million who have now fled Ukraine.

“We’re working with the greatest network on planet Earth, the local church,” says Karl Hargestam, CityServe’s vice president of CityServe affiliates. “We’re empowering the church to be the driving catalyst for life and community transformation in a time like this as people are coming. ... More than half of all the refugees leaving Ukraine are coming to Poland now. They’re also come into Romania, Hungary, Moldova, of course, into the rest of Europe, but most at this point is in Poland.”

Hargestam says City Serve is working with the Pentecostal Church Network and others to meet the burgeoning need. “This is a beautiful testimony,” he says. “These brothers and sisters, they’re opening their homes; they’re opening their churches; they’re cooking the food—whatever they have. ... So what we’re doing is helping hold their arms up. What we’re coming alongside is to help resource those churches to do more.

“Right now, what CityServe is doing is empowering the churches with food, blankets, resources—it’s coming to those people to just help the churches to keep holding up their arms and welcoming these people,” Hargestam adds. “That’s the immediate response. And then we’re sending some into Ukraine for the people remaining there. But we’re hearing incredible reports of people both brave and of churches being really that salt or light in a really, really dark time in the world.”

CityServe has not delayed in its response to those needs,

Donaldson says. "These trucks have already been rolling. When we get funds in, we're not letting them sit in our hands. We're wiring a significant amount of resources to the front lines. ... We're going out aggressively for the local churches there."

"It's been a real joy to see the body of Christ come together," says Todd Lamphere, CityServe's vice president of government relations. "Everyone wants to know what to do. ... Obviously, they give. But we wanted to put together an event that would allow God's people here in the United States to be able to touch the people in the Ukraine and in Poland." He and his team in Central Florida put together an event this past weekend, involving 1,500 volunteers, to pack 1 million meals for the Ukrainian refugees.

Although he calls the Ukraine crisis "a tragedy of epic proportion," Wendell Vinson, CityServe's vice chairman and president, also has a word of encouragement. "The church of Jesus Christ is rising up in Europe. This is going to be, I believe, a catalyst for the church to rise up in a more powerful way working together in Europe, to respond to this need that is before them.

"The church of Jesus Christ is God's infrastructure," he adds. "There's no other infrastructure like the church. It is the infrastructure for the healing of the nations. It is the infrastructure for hope. And as the church rises up in this moment, I think we're going to see something really powerful happen ... People are awakening in Europe. Obviously, they're praying; they're seeking God. They're working together."

And this presents a tremendous opportunity, Vinson says. "We have an opportunity as the church here in America to come alongside of them. When all the NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] leave, when all the organizations leave that do good work, the church will still be there. And this is what the opportunity is: to strengthen the church is going to be

there. They're going to be doing this and reaching people long after everyone else has gone."

To hear more about the life-giving work CityServe is doing in Eastern Europe and how you can be a part of it, listen to this entire episode of the *Strang Report* at this link, and donate to CityServe's work during the Ukrainian crisis here. For more inspiring stories like this one, be sure to subscribe to the *Strang Report* on Apple Podcasts or your favorite podcast platform. {eo}

Read articles like this one and other Spirit-led content in our new platform, CHARISMA PLUS.