

Confronting Darkness in Ukraine

Read time: 8 minutes 9 seconds

(Undisclosed location, UKRAINE) – Late at night at an undisclosed location, Matthias Floreck was laying down with his hands behind his head staring at the ceiling trying to make sense of it all. Still inside Ukraine, he had just come back from witnessing the evidence of the massacres and war crimes on the ground in Bucha and Irpin.

The smell of dead bodies and burnt buildings was in his clothes and still in his nostrils. Witnessing the death and destruction his emotional survival skills kicked in, keeping him composed and clear headed no matter what hell-on-earth threw at him.

He begin to visualize and develop project plans and solutions scribbling down thoughts on a piece of paper on how to best handle the escalating humanitarian aid crisis in Ukraine's different regions with the aid, finances and connections he had. The Russian assault was along a widespread line. Warning sirens were going off, maybe he got two hours of sleep, but most likely just one again.

Vineyard Humanitarian Aid Response

Floreck and the team consisting of pastor Tudor Procopciuc, Vineyard Ungheni, Moldova and leader/pastor Reinhard Rehberg of Vineyard Speyer, Germany are managing a project orchestra of eight to 10 different humanitarian aid/logistics/feeding programs inside Ukraine and across national borders in neighboring EU countries. Always on the move, constantly assigning responsibilities, acquiring new resources, they helped organize over 12,000 meals (and counting) during the first wave of the humanitarian surge and are still operating

24/7 like others from the start of the war.

“After the first three days of war, I was there,” stated Floreck. He is one of the few who does not run from wars or a crisis, they run to them.

It is now Day 240 of the Russian invasion of the war in Ukraine and they are continuing humanitarian aid efforts non-stop.

Vineyard re-invents itself

Floreck is one of Martin Bühlmann’s lieutenants and point man for Ukraine and humanitarian aid. Bühlmann is Vineyard’s Leader Emeritus DACH for Switzerland, Germany and Austria and part of the global Vineyard leadership’s “brain trust” with over 70 churches under his umbrella of responsibility.

Facing the greatest threat of evil coming upon Europe since WWII, Bühlmann and Company responded immediately initiating meetings, networking globally to acquire humanitarian aid resources, reinventing Vineyard DACH on the fly throwing people, time and resources into creating the most effective and agile humanitarian aid unit they could.

Bühlmann has been adamant about the Christian Church assuming their responsibility and responding to help care for, house and feed over 6.8 million Ukraine refugees in the neighboring EU member states including Switzerland and another 8 million IDPs (Internally Displaced People).

Jumping into the mainstream media and European political fray, Bühlmann is not limited in influence to church organizations. Understanding with alacrity the consequences of inaction and appeasement, Putin’s multiple nuclear threats made against Poland, Finland and Germany, Bühlmann took his pulpit to the public square speaking out against Swiss political neutrality and lame, inactive political leadership, wherever and whenever forcibly challenging them to assume responsibility and to

stand up for freedom.

New church models

Churches small and large are changing their operating models across Europe, throwing the bulk of their resources and energies into mitigating the on-going humanitarian relief aid crisis.

Floreck is more than a “project coordinator.” He is able to go into war zones and natural disasters around the world, interface with military or government officials, help develop on-the-spot solutions, run communications tying “the (organizational) strings together” and operate in different environments and levels of hostilities no matter what the conditions.

Sustaining the provision

According to Floreck, during the first wave of the refugee migration out of Ukraine, there were many miracles of provision of aid coming in “from God knows where,” along with concentrated, round-the-clock efforts of many individuals and organizations.

Back on the Ukraine border in the midst of the human suffering and despair, Floreck stated “I saw not just hundreds, but thousands of refugees in lines, coming in off trains, in cars, arriving to hotels and relief aid centers...”

“The train issue was huge” in terms of numbers, individuals, families and immediate importance. Thousands of Ukrainians fleeing the conflict had been traveling to Hungary and held on Moldovan trains for eight to nine hours without food and water.

Procopciuc, Floreck and Rehberg

Floreck, team leader Procopciuc and Rehberg upon arriving in the midst of the train crisis, standing among the thousands of

suffering and traumatized Ukrainians many who left with only the clothes on their backs, they quickly sized up the situation... They interfaced with railway personnel and other humanitarian aid workers and helped solve the problem by creating food packages and setting up relief aid stands at the train stations to distribute them.

“We helped make over 12,000 food packages with a sandwich, apple, chocolate bar and water bottle to give to the refugees.” The “Moldova authorities realized what was going on then quickly changed what they were doing and adopted our system.” The aid and program is continuing to this day.

Humanitarian aid logistics

What many people don't understand in humanitarian aid is how fast you have to think on your feet. For many, when you arrive in a country, boots-on-the-ground, where you don't speak the language and the incoming refugees who speak another language, don't speak their language or yours either, you have to adapt quickly.

You have 20,000 or 30,000 hungry and traumatized people and children at the train station. Then you need to organize teams of people to drive to supermarkets within 150 kilometer radius of the crisis area. They go inside, wait in line and hand the credit card to the cashier at the supermarket and say reading their list: “I'll take all the food... in rows two, three and four of the store. Plus, all the pallets of water. Oh! The apples and oranges? How many do you have? Fine. We'll take all the crates now. Bread? Tomatoes and lettuce? That too. We'll take it. Thank you. Total it up. The truck is outside. Thanks! See you soon. We'll be back.” And off you go. This is repeated continually in one form or another by humanitarian aid workers thousands of times all over Poland, Moldova, Hungary, Romania and Germany, et al., since the start of the war.

Floreck described the team's efforts: “In Poland, we also set

up a new program for up to 200 families each for three months. There is a selection process. They get a membership card. Then they can pick up food, get medical aid, hygiene products, pay for electricity and water. We include hiring local people to help the refugees, purchasing locally to reduce costs and hiring people to support the local economy. It's financed by the international Vineyard family."

"In Timișoara, Romania we were on the border at the small bridge crossing. It cannot be crossed by large trucks. In that situation with the families, they needed generators, blankets and sleeping bags. We got it to them and then funneled the aid through different Ukrainian organizations in different places."

"The Ukrainian army chaplains are important to us. We supported the chaplains by giving them what they asked for the most: 200 large first aid kits." Done. Delivered and saving lives.

The Church's Responsibility

Responding decisively and immediately to the murderous onslaught of the Russian invasion birthing the largest humanitarian aid crisis in the 21st century Bühlmann, Floreck, Procopciuc and Rehberg of Vineyard DACH "get it." They understand the responsibility and role of the church on the planet.

The vicious Russian invasion with all of its manifest evil in various forms including over 1,850,000 Ukrainians forcibly deported into Russia on an industrial scale along with more than 230,000 children is the greatest threat to Europe and has the necessary critical elements to potentially kindle WWII. It is causing churches and denominations to adapt, reorganize and meet the challenges, transforming from stagnant denominations to agile humanitarian operations over night utilizing multiple models to raise finances, house and feed

refugees and distribute aid.

Individual Efforts Add Up

German economics expert and consultant, Johannes Bartels from Bonn, Germany, like other individuals and families in Europe is helping to house, feed and care for two families in his own apartment in Bonn. That alone is a full time job, but like thousands of others it is a responsibility he gladly accepts.

City of Bonn officials and officials in other cities in Germany, Poland and neighboring EU countries have been working tirelessly since the start of the war to house millions of Ukrainians “anywhere they can” in various apartments, houses, in tents on unused airport strips and empty buildings along with continuing the food and medical programs.

On Day 230, the humanitarian aid situation is far from being over.

The Command

The military runs on commands. So does God Almighty.

Before the apostolic, before the prophetic and pastoral gifts, before evangelism, before Pentecost, before all that and more... Jesus said in speaking to his disciples about the 5,000: “YOU feed them.” The command’s priority and importance is hammered out as the only miracle recorded by all four of the Gospel writers.

The malignant evil of the Russian invasion, the annihilation of civilians, the rising numbers of war crimes and consequential humanitarian aid crisis is the European and global Church’s responsibility.

This is why the church is on the planet: to meet darkness face-to-face head on and fully defeat it, along with caring for and healing the wounded.

As Bühlmann continually reiterates, there is no “opt out” box to tick. Period. {eoa}

To donate to ongoing relief efforts in Ukraine you can give here and mark your donation “Ukraine Relief.”

Steven V Selthoffer *is a communications executive based in Germany. He has worked in humanitarian/relief aid for over 20 years with our NATO partners and has testified in joint U.S. Senate and Congressional OSCE hearings on relief aid, international relations and security.*