

How God, Ivanka Trump and UPS Help Churches Get 1 Million Meals to Ukrainian Refugees

"Many Ukrainians are experiencing starvation, and this includes children," says Dave Donaldson, co-founder of CityServe International. "When they see our trucks, it gives them hope that somebody from the outside cares."

On Feb. 26, CityServe's leadership and Paula White, President Donald Trump's pastor, settled on an idea to help Ukrainian refugees get food. They decided to pack 1 million meals and send it over to Ukraine. On Feb. 28, Ivanka Trump, President Trump's daughter and former adviser, called White and asked, "What are you doing for the Ukrainian people?"

"We're ordering a million meals, and this is what it's gonna cost," White said.

Ivanka replied, "I'll pay for that."

"That was a miracle," says Todd Lamphere, vice president of government relations for CityServe. Lamphere continues, "We didn't pull the trigger on ordering the ingredients until Tuesday, March 1." Even though they didn't order supplies until March 1, CityServe and White decided they had to pack the meals on Saturday, March 5, in order to meet the immediate need for food in Ukraine.

"To pack a million meals, it takes 8,000 man-hours," says Lamphere.

With only three days to recruit thousands of volunteers, White's church, City of Destiny in Apopka, Florida, transformed its sanctuary into 90 meal-packing assembly lines. After a three-day effort to publicize the need for volunteers

to area churches, organizations and schools, they hoped volunteers would come to help.

On Saturday morning, over 1,850 volunteers showed up.

“Those are the ones who signed up with their individual names,” says Lamphere. “As we began to count their families, well over 2,500 people were there. That was miracle No. 2.” In less than 24 hours with thousands of volunteers, 1 million meals were prepared, packed and ready to be shipped, but nobody was sure how they would be shipped.

“160,000 pounds of food is a lot to ship for free,” Lamphere says. “We had a couple of organizations who said they would help, but when they realized it was 160,000 pounds, they were like, ‘We can’t handle that.’”

When she heard about the challenges in transporting the food, Ivanka Trump called UPS, and the UPS Foundation said it would fly all 160,000 pounds of food over the Atlantic free of charge.

After a few days of getting the final approval, UPS sent four trucks to pick up 100 pallets of meals and took them to Atlanta. On Feb. 12, the meals arrived in Frankfurt, Germany, and ran into another obstacle.

“Germany wanted to put an import tax on it,” says Lamphere. “Then just out of the blue, they said, ‘We’re not going to charge you.’”

Something similar happened in Poland.

“Poland wanted to put a duty tax on the food,” explains Lamphere. “But out of the blue, they say, ‘We’re going to waive the duty tax.’”

The 160,000 pounds of food then was taken to CityServe’s hub in Poland and to a warehouse, where drivers who partner with CityServe take the food across the border in smaller vans,

trucks and unmarked vehicles to avoid confrontation or detection by Russian forces.

"These drivers are a mixture of pastors and brave laymen who risk their life every time they drive across the border," says Donaldson. "This is life and death each and every day."

"These vans and these church leaders are taking food in, but they're also taking people out," says Crissy Cochran, CityServe's director of communications. "There are people in Ukraine saying, 'I want to get out,' and these drivers are risking their lives to evacuate them after already risking their lives to bring them food."

"This is similar to Dunkirk, where in World War II personal boats were deployed all over England to rescue soldiers from Hitler's advancing army," says Donaldson. "We are purchasing vehicles, but some of these trucks are private. Others are personal. We have worked hard establishing these corridors to parts of Ukraine behind enemy lines, and that's been one of the great miracles thus far. None of our drivers or team members have been hurt or captured."

Pastors who have sent their congregations to safety across the border have stayed to help feed people who haven't made it out of Ukraine. They help CityServe by coordinating with them how to get food to those in need.

"They've even developed apps," says Lamphere. "If you need food, you go to this app and you see where food is getting distributed. Charles Dickens said, 'It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.' In this war, I've seen the worst of times. But to see the churches step up and be the hands and feet of Jesus, that's the best of times."

"We've seen churches and Christian organizations in the U.S. and Ukraine rise up in unity," he adds. "We've seen God provide the money and shipping through unlikely sources like Ivanka Trump and UPS. And we've seen God protect our driver's

behind enemy lines. It's just been one miracle after another to get that food there." {eo}

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