

Michael Evans in Ukraine: 'There Is No Greater Hope Than the Name of Jesus'

There is no greater hope than the name of Jesus.

That is what resonates in my mind as I finish up my last few hours in Ukraine. It's my second trip in as many months. In total, we've been able to bring 60 tons of food into the country.

Working through connections with the local churches, we have been able to ensure that the food we bring gets into the right hands. Many Americans wish to help those innocent people in Ukraine that have been overwhelmed by the horrors of war, but few are able to make the journey here, by want or opportunity.

Rarer still are those that leave the relative safety of the border. The only reason I'm able to do so is because our ministry was already operating in Ukraine before the invasion. I have strong conviction that the peace the Holy Spirit brings is more important than the fears of man.

Fresh off the plane to Warsaw, this journey started with a 36-hour road trip through a country at war.

We brought two trucks with 20 tons of food each. The trip went slowly as the recently pulled back Russians have left the countryside in shambles, and fuel is sometimes hard to come by.

For a few moments, you can forget where you are as you look out over the picturesque forests and hills. Then, a blown-out building or the wreck of a tank shocks you back to reality.

While dozing off, tired from the flight and long drive, I awoke to the sound and impact of an explosion. The car in

front of us had just hit a land mine. A parting gift from the Russians.

I arrived in Poltava in the early morning and started to unload the first truck with the help of some church volunteers. I soon realized these volunteers are almost all refugees themselves. Families that have lost their homes in Kharkiv now live in the church. Sunday school classrooms turned into bedrooms.

That church was the staging point for this trip. But there are other churches all working to serve their communities as best they can.

I was quickly whisked off to one church service and then another. The Ukrainians celebrate Easter a week later than Americans, and to my surprise, I'm the key speaker for their Easter services. I hadn't changed my clothes in days, but they didn't seem to mind.

Every place I visited seemed to want not just food but also a word of encouragement. I was humbled to deliver it. We prayed a lot between delivering van loads of food. There is a saying, "There are no atheists in foxholes." It's true.

Everyone wants prayer, whether it's at the altar of a church or outside of a ruined village where they still live. It was a challenge to pray with dry eyes, especially when you know these people have lost everything.

We delivered food to remote villages where food is hard to come by. I can only describe these places as battlegrounds. The village was gone; not a single building was unharmed. But if you ask the residents, the village is still there, because they are still there. As hungry as they are for food, they're also hungry to be seen, to be heard, to be encouraged and feel loved – to feel hope.

Outside of a one-room church that shelters its congregation, I

was reminded how real the danger is in these poor villages. I grew used to hearing the air sirens warning of missile attacks, but an alarm went off inside my head when I noticed a local pastor getting dangerously close to an unexploded shell. Even through the language barrier, he knew exactly what I was warning him of.

Kharkiv was a different animal altogether. The Russians are still very much on the offensive there. Often you can hear the shelling, relentless like a thunderstorm on the plains states in America. Other times, one bomb after another blend into each other – like a giant who has his hands on an equally giant machine gun.

“You have kids jumping up and down upstairs?” I asked an orthodox minister as the shelling started up again. I smiled and he smiled back warmly. This man has converted a Soviet theater into a beacon of hope in a city under siege. All types of people sleep in its cavernous basement. Christians of every denomination pray in circles.

A Jewish synagogue operates here. I was honored to bring them food and supplies. This gem of a man cooks three meals a day for 200 people and was eager to share his recipes with me.

Kharkiv is filled with the bombs of their enemies, but it's also filled with people coming to and rekindling their faith. It's filled with people banding together to serve one another. I'm proud to be a part of that.

One last objective remained, and that was to pick up the mother-in-law of a local pastor. She was stuck, living in the basement of her home because the rest of the house was destroyed. Unknown to me, it was her 77th birthday. I think transporting her out of Kharkiv was more of a blessing to me than to her.

As that task was completed, my job in Ukraine was done. Relationships had been made, distribution of food seen to and

final destinations confirmed.

We'll be able to send more to those cities and villages soon. The food, medicine and other aid we've brought in to serve these people is very much needed, but I think the most important things we brought were a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit and the hope that the Lord brings. {eo}

Michael Evans *is the son of Mike Evans, founder of the Friends of Zion Heritage Center in Jerusalem.*

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