

Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches Surge in Warzone

Across a barren landscape, Pentecostal and evangelical churches are struggling to provide for the number of people searching for answers in war-torn Ukraine.

A surge in attendees has revealed the spiritual hunger gripping the people's hearts who have lost so much in the wake of the hyper-politicized conflict.

While Americans are torn between sending financial and military support to Ukraine, the people most affected by Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion are turning to God in record numbers.

"Churches are packed out because people are seeking God," says Jane M. Dollar, 57, an Assemblies of God world missionary to Ukraine who has spent the past year operating a center for Ukrainian refugees in Poland.

The problem is, there are not enough shepherds to guide the new flock of believers during their hour of need.

"People heard the message of the good news," says Mykhailo Panochko, senior bishop of the 100-year-old Ukrainian Pentecostal Church. "Many repented and have been disciplined and baptized. The harvest is so big that we lack workers, ministers, people who can feed and grow the people, maturing them in Christ."

A person does not have to agree with the political turmoil and corruption that has gripped both sides of this war to support the true victims, the citizens of Ukraine, as they thirst for the living water of everlasting life.

The hunger is so great, Panochko says, that some congregations

have over 500 members and only one minister to help them.

"Everyone has many questions about the present situation, but also the future destiny of their souls," Panochko says. "People are looking for answers."

"The full-scale invasion showed us the incredible potential of the church in ministry to our nation," says Panochko. "The churches immediately started huge social projects to help people in need. Pentecostal churches rescued and evacuated 100,000 people combined from combat zones."

As reported by the Assemblies of God (AG), "Those zones include the eastern border with Russia where, in late February, a small team of Christian laypeople took a van and trailer loaded with food and Bibles into hostile territory. When the Russian army pulled back from occupied places last fall, Pentecostal church teams rushed in to bring food, hygiene items and medical supplies to people in places like Izium. That city today looks as if torn from a post-apocalyptic graphic novel; bombed and blasted to pieces; multistory buildings cloven in two by missiles; and few people moving about the vacant streets."

The sound of war can still be heard, and in many cases felt, in towns such as Lyman, where an AG team was visiting and delivering supplies. The boom of artillery rattles windows while the movement of nearby tanks gives the ground a constant reverberation that villagers become numb to. Add the seemingly endless flow of soldiers throughout the village, and war simply becomes the way of life for many of the Pentecostal church's new congregants.

While there, a mother and her daughter approached the team and shared with them how they found their new "house of prayer."

"Now all my family is going to church," said the mother, clutching her Bible. "I couldn't live without church!"

As the eastern front of Ukraine bared the brunt of the Russian invasion, all was not quiet on the western front either.

Millions of refugees poured into the area, and the Pentecostal churches of western Ukraine assumed the role of caretaker to those escaping the horrors of war.

“Churches provided housing for people heading for the border to get out of the country,” Panocho says. “There were many mattresses all over the sanctuary, the stage, the pastors’ offices, the Sunday School classes, everywhere.”

All of this and much more is being done in the name of Jesus.

It reinforces the Bible’s truth that no matter how bleak a situation may seem to the physical eye, God’s Spirit moves where there are people hungry for salvation.

Even when they’ve lost everything else in life, the new Christians in Ukraine have the love of Christ to hold onto and strengthen them while enduring the setbacks of the world.

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