



October 1, 2023

Dear Ministry Partner,

Warm greetings in the Savior . . . as I head home from Ukraine!

We heard air raid sirens several times and reports of rockets falling in the easternmost regions of the country . . . but by God's grace, our travels were mostly peaceful.

As the war wears on, there is stress fatigue, and a lot of PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder. The Ukrainian government expects an epidemic of PTSD in the months ahead. But there's also good news: The government recognizes that churches can offer an effective response to PTSD and other crisis symptoms—and they're asking our churches to help!

I'm thrilled to report that *a spiritual wave is rolling over Ukraine like never before*. There is an amazing openness toward talking about God, about the Bible, and about Jesus!

In a region previously occupied by the Russians but now back in Ukrainian control, we visited five recently reopened churches in a single day. At every stop, we found a crowd of people eagerly awaiting our arrival—most of whom *did not know the Lord*.

The people in every church listened to us as if they were receiving something directly from God. The Lord gave me five different passages, one for each audience, and each audience offered exactly the same humble, attentive response.

➤ ***Some 150 people made decisions for Christ on that one day!***

Guiding our team from town to town was Bogdan, an on-fire leader who has launched a dozen churches in the region. He planted one church while he was in our program—and now he is planting churches *wholesale!* But he also knows that if we take him on as a partner, he can plant scores more churches. *The only question is, **Do we have the capacity to say YES?***

I have to smile, remembering the words of the late great E.V. Hill as he spoke to our group: **“If this doesn't get you excited and on fire, your wood is wet!”**

But there is little to smile about as we survey the wreckage of Ukraine. People's brokenness and their openness to things of the spirit have come because there are war casualties everywhere. In Ukraine today every cemetery is a field of Ukrainian flags waving in the wind. There are flags standing over the fresh graves of loved sons and daughters . . . children who have just now left their families and friends, cut down in a savage, senseless war.

Again and again, I saw the same scene: a mother and her daughter, or her daughter-in-law, dressed in black praying over the fresh grave of a son or husband. Most of the new tombstones are smooth and shiny, with a photo of the deceased etched by laser into the stone. The departed loved one smiles. As I walked around, a young widow was heading out with family members; she walked as if pulled forward, resisting the separation from her loved one.



In the heart of Kyiv, the capital city, is a green lawn. But you can't see the grass. The lawn is completely covered with small flags representing the 120,000 or more who have fallen.

But the sporadic air raid alarms and the injuries and deaths on the front, are not the end of the trauma for many families. As the war drags on, the Ukrainian military has been forced to expand the draft, tapping *old* and *older* demographics to supply enough personnel for the ghastly work of war. As if the conflict hasn't already produced enough uncertainty and fear, now there's the constant worry of a male family member being subjected to conscription.

I had dinner with one such couple, Vitaly and Ludmila. He was Dean of Faculty at Kyiv Theological Seminary, our partner for the last 21 years in planting hundreds of churches throughout the land. **A year ago he was teaching advanced Bible and theology courses, as well as leading the faculty. Now, he's wearing fatigues.**

- He was on his way to work when he came to a Ukraine Army control point. The guard pulled him over, asked to see his papers, then calmly told him to report to a certain military base the following Monday. Vitaly knew it must be a mistake. "I am a pastor, Dean of Faculty," he insisted. "Did you see the papers?" The guard, with an understanding smile, said, "Yes. *You also need to go.*"

Vitaly spent a month in intensive basic training. Then he was ordered onto a bus with a total of 50 soldiers heading to the front lines in the east. There, the commander was very gracious, yet constrained by the reality of the situation.

"You are here to fight the enemy," he said. "But if you have any medical or mental condition that will not allow you to fight, you have a clear opportunity right now to *not go to battle*. We may have you do something else." *Twenty of the 50 men came off the lineup.*

The commander took the remaining 30 to the field of battle, just behind the front lines. Here, he addressed the men again. "You may have a clearer picture now of what we have to do. If there are any who may have doubts about their ability to fight, you have one last chance to leave. You also need to know that after this opportunity, if you do not fight, I will put you in jail." *Another 10 men took their leave.*

Only 20 men, including Vitaly, went to the front lines.

When the group learned that he was a pastor, they responded warmly and began calling him "padre." "Let's start by having you pray for my soldiers," the commander said. When Vitaly clarified that he was not an Orthodox priest, the commander replied, "It's okay, we need prayer from anyone who is able to pray. You pray for us."

Before long, the commander asked his superiors to make Vitaly a battlefield chaplain an officer-level post! Today Vitaly feels God has redirected his calling to serve as an elder brother to soldiers desperate for hope. Soldiers approach him, they open up, they talk themselves empty . . . and **Vitaly is leading many to Christ!**

Your love is being felt in Ukraine, even if you didn't realize it. . . .



When the Russians first advanced toward Kyiv, Ukrainians blew up the bridge at Irpin to stop them. (A media photo of the devastated bridge has become an iconic image of the war.) Holding their position at Irpin, the Russians began wreaking havoc. They plundered, raped, and pillaged. They shot up houses for the fun of it. Ultimately, the Ukrainians recaptured the destroyed city.

But thanks to generous partners like you, we began rushing relief into the city: food, medicines, fuel, direct aid to some 200 households. You also helped build three houses for families whose homes had been literally blown up by Russian rockets. A large church built on a campsite morphed into a major center for refugees during the Russian onslaught. Your love shone through.

We'll see these and many other heroic deeds replayed in eternity, thanks to the support you provided to the people of Irpin in the most agonizing of times.

But God keeps opening more doors! There is so much more to be done! Pastor Mykola Romaniuk has seen, in the midst of nationwide trauma, the incredible need for Bible-based counselor training. Last Sunday, they announced the initiative in church and asked how many might be interested in training. *Fifty people came forward!*

“You would have to be blind,” one said, “not to see that *everyone needs this in our country right now!*”

And even this is just the tiniest tip of the iceberg. **The openness of people's hearts in this time of urgent need is presenting us with the single greatest opportunity for the Gospel that Ukraine has ever known!** NOW is the time to mobilize every single resource to seize this unprecedented harvest opportunity!

I witnessed it myself. People are searching fervently, longing for answers. People in every community wanted to hear all of it. They wanted to hear it straight. They did not want to miss a single detail. They wanted to understand the invitation perfectly and to respond completely to ensure the desired result: “We want to be on God's side. We want God to be on our side. We do not want to miss the objective!”

- **Will you give to help deploy chaplains and counselors? The need is vast.** So many have loved ones in the military; many have already lost those they love. All are navigating a horrible new reality in which a nation many times wealthier and more powerful than theirs has decided to take their property, their country, and their lives.

Pastor Mykola was only the first pastor to make the case to us about fielding chaplains and counselors. Pastor Peter Marchenko of Transformation Church spoke to me in even more desperate terms. In the meantime, he and his people are working feverishly to open coffee shops staffed by volunteers who can share the Gospel as people stop in seeking warmth, both physical and spiritual, as the brutal Ukrainian winter sets in.

Meanwhile, our friend Bogdan—who has already planted a dozen or so churches in his region—is asking us to roll all of his churches into the program to maximize their impact and help as many of their countrymen as possible.



Yes, it's just as the late great E.V. Hill said! *If this doesn't set you on fire, your wood is wet!*

The opportunity and the need are daunting. But I hope we can see the divine equation:

1. Yes, the needs are great. **2.** Our God is great. **3.** *I am not great—but neither was Joshua when God called him to lead Israel into the Promised Land.*

- In Deuteronomy 1, Moses recounted the marching orders they had received from God to take possession of the territory: “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.” By Joshua 12, not long after, they had conquered it all! **This is not our work; it is God's work! If we are willing, if we are faithful, He will make it happen.**

It has been such a privilege, one of the greatest of my life, to partner with our Ukrainian brothers and sisters for more than 20 years. The fellowship in the Gospel and the fellowship of sufferings, is a treasure . . . and legacy of eternal proportions. You have been part of that partnership through your prayers and giving.

Now, we face our Galatians 6:9 moment: “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

We are called to persevere in doing good and not lose heart, even when faced with challenges or discouragement. In due time we will experience the rewards and blessings of their actions. This is the promise of our God!

The way forward is to trust Him, and know that the Promised Land is ahead.

So I bring you this heartfelt plea: Keep praying. Keep giving. Give as generously as you can, to help our brothers and sisters in Ukraine and around the world. Let's do everything possible to align ourselves with the move of God in our war-torn, sin-sick world . . . so that God's love may prevail! Let us continue in the train of His glory, from victory unto victory! I hope to hear from you soon. God bless you!

Joyful in the Harvest,



Dr. Manny Fernandez

P.S. The cry of my heart today is that I may be able to send word to our partners in Ukraine: “Help is on the way!” Please stand with them, in spirit and in truth, by giving your best today. Thank you again!



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