

PRAYERS FOR UKRANIAN METHODISTS

Rev. Martin Lee, Dir. of Congregational Development and Redevelopment

Several years ago, Bishop Eduardo Khegay, Resident Bishop of the Eurasia Episcopal Area, and the Moscow UMC Seminary President invited me to help train new church planters. I met a wide assortment of pastors and church leaders from around the entire region, including the Ukrainian District Superintendent, Rev. Oleg Starodubets, who also serves Kyrgystan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. He is a man with a passion for growing Christ's church, and my prayers are with him and his family at this time.



In 2015, Rev. Martin Lee met with church planters Rev. Oleg Starodubets District Superintendent of Central Asia UMC in Ukraine and Rev. Dr. Yulia Starodubets, ordained UMC pastor and medical doctor in Ukraine.

I grew up during the Cold War and vividly remember the tensions between the Soviet Union and the U.S. When I was first traveling through Russia, I felt uneasy thinking of all of the stories I had heard. But I was in the midst of a small community called together in the name of Jesus Christ, people from Russia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgistan. We were one family in Jesus' name.

Our time together focused on how we would share God's love and God's grace with each other and then the rest of the world. We are, indeed, all one body in Christ. We celebrate the same gifts and graces in ministry, and we worry about the same problems and crises of day-to-day ministry. Of course, now, my friends in Ukraine are struggling through a crisis that seemed unimaginable just a few months ago.

War is tragic.

Seeing the children of God threatening and destroying one another in violent conflict is heartbreaking. I once saw the joy and communion of Russians and Ukrainians sitting at the table together, worshipping together, sharing ideas and hopes and dreams.

Now, I wonder how those friends and ministry partners are coping with all that is happening around them. I know that many Russians are opposed to the action taken by their nation's leaders. And I know that most Ukrainians and most Russians view one another as brothers and sisters. That has been even more true in the Church.

Rev. Oleg Starodubets District Superintendent of Central Asia UMC, Ukraine (right) and Rev. Dr. Yulia Starodubets an ordained UMC Pastor and medical doctor (left) join NIC leaders via Zoom to learn more about the challenges and perils of the war for their churches in the region.

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PRAYERS FOR UKRANIAN METHODISTS (CONTINUED)

On Monday, March 15, Rev. Starodubets and his wife Rev. Dr. Yulia Starodubets, who is an ordained UMC pastor and medical doctor in Ukraine, joined the Conference Secretary of Global Ministries Shirley M. Pulgar Hughes, Director of Connectional Ministries Arlene Christopherson and me via Zoom to share the latest on the situation in Ukraine.

We shared the Northern Illinois Conference churches will be raising money for Ukraine assistance through the 2022 Bishop's Appeal special offering at Annual Conference.

As the Russian invasion escalated, Rev. Starodubets, his wife and twin 9-year-old daughters had to flee from their home in Kyiv to western Ukraine to seek shelter in a school. They are staying in Ukraine to continue to provide help to their church members and others staying in the country.

"We have one pastor of a church in Kharvkiv that was surrounded by shelling at the very beginning of the war who did not leave," said Rev. Starodubets. "The city's infrastructure and buildings are destroyed. He lives in the church building with no electricity and water. We can't reach him because the city is surrounded by the Russian army, but by God's grace we have been able to support him financially."

The Ukrainian District Superintendent and his wife don't want to abandon their flock and are continuing to provide necessities such as food and clothing to refugees seeking shelter in United Methodist buildings and a secondary school until they can safely leave.

As the couple wake to the sounds of sirens at night, the family huddles in the basement of their shelter praying for an end to the war. They appreciate all the prayers and support during this extremely difficult and dangerous time.

"We have a special prayer request as the Russian army is trying to occupy Kyiv," said Rev. Starodubets. "Support us in prayer that our capital stay. We want peace for our people. We want peace under the condition of freedom of occupants who are killing our people to leave our land. Pray for freedom of Ukraine." As John Wesley said, "The World is my parish." Christ's love knows no boundaries. It reminds us that we have more work to do in our mission to bring the world one step closer to God's Kingdom on Earth. We pray for the safety of Ukrainians and the end of this war.

Please join me in prayer for Ukraine and please share your resources to support the mission and ministry of the Church in Ukraine and other parts of the world.

Watch a video at <https://vimeo.com/688645770>

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