









- The Baptist Union of Ukraine -

Country in Fever

Until recently, the last echo of war sounded in Ukraine in the distance; 1945. Many countries that spent years as republics of the Soviet Union experienced turbulent times after its collapse. Whereas, Ukraine gained independence without bloodshed making us proud.

Nevertheless, at the end of 2013 a conflict arose because of economic, political and informational pressure from Russia. The protests were aimed at preserving Ukraine's geopolitical course towards European integration. As a result, Russia would suffer further loss of control over Ukraine, meanwhile Ukraine would get economic, political and eventually military guarantees to help it stay the course. It became known as the Revolution of Dignity (also called Euromaidan Revolution).



Victory of the revolution was followed by the President's escape to Russia, where Viktor Yanukovych sought shelter. Key outcomes of Euromaidan were the President's self-removal from exercising his functions, restoration of the 2004 version of the Ukrainian Constitution, the abolition of "dictatorial" laws and holding early presidential elections. The shift of power drastically reduced Russian influence on Ukraine.

In March 2014, Russian forces, together with their Cossack troops, held a Referendum on the status of Crimea. As a result, Crimea was claimed as the Russian Federation Republic of Crimea within the structure of the Russian Federation. The Referendum was not recognized by international community, it violates Ukraine's Constitution, domestic laws, general principles of international law and has no legal effect.

After the occupation of the Crimea, pro-Russian separatists, jointly with a group of armed Russian citizens, seized control over Donetsk and Luhansk regions, proclaiming them as Donetsk People's Republic (DPR or DNR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR or LNR) respectively.

UKRAINE'S TERRITORIES, OCCUPIED BY RUSSIA AND PRO-RUSSIAN MILITANTS



Even before the escalation of conflict Russian media actively promoted the idea of separatism in south-eastern Ukraine, referring to the ban of Russian language and Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, and thus fueled public outrage in Russia and south-east of Ukraine.

Level of Religious Freedom

The beginning of 2014 led to deterioration of religious freedom. Attempts were made to increase state control over the churches with the aim to limit their participation in public and political life of the country. However, there have been improvements in the church-state dialogue after the Revolution of Dignity and due to the shift in nation's leadership with exception of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions that suffer from Russian military aggression.

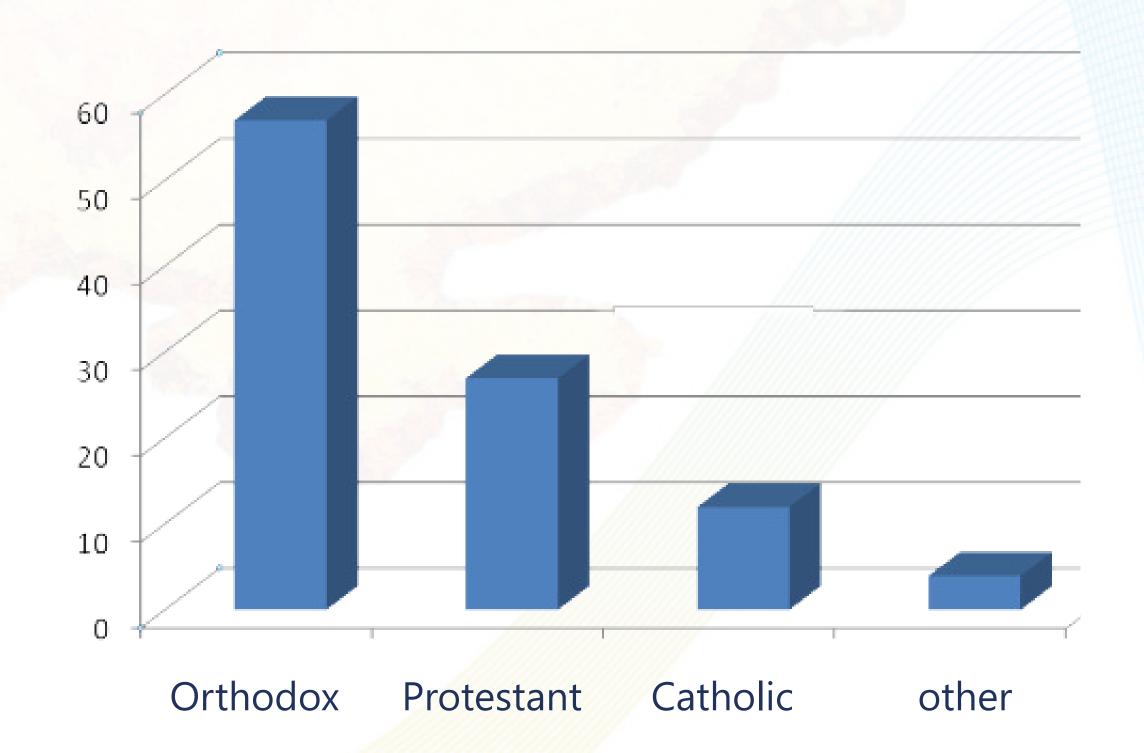
In fact, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion ceased to be guaranteed, as well as other fundamental rights and freedoms generally accepted in the democratic world.

Denominations

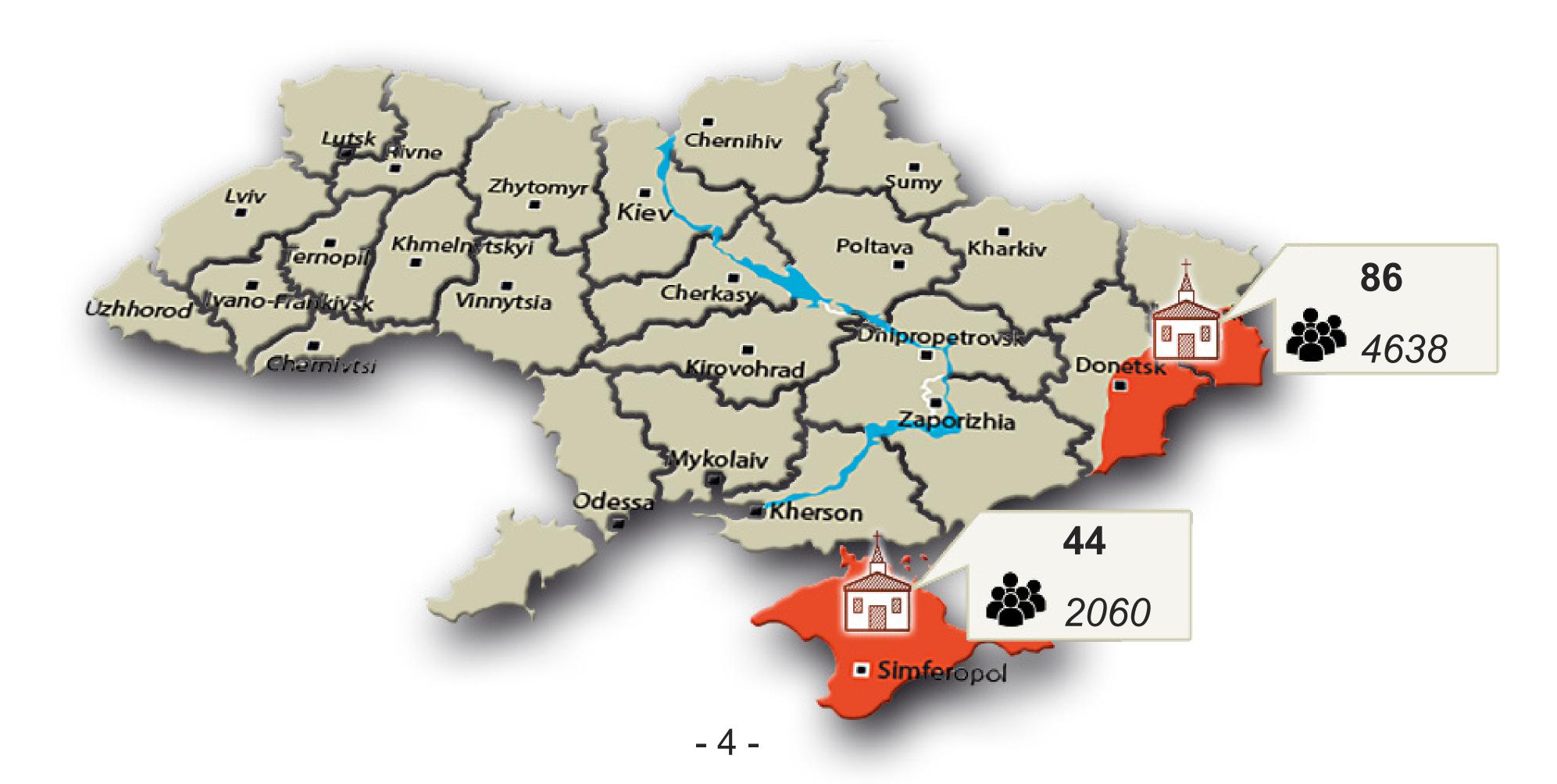
57% of faith communities in Ukraine are Orthodox and 12% are Catholic. There are 500 thousand Muslims living in Ukraine, most of them are Crimean Tatars who form the third largest ethnic group in Crimea (300 thousand

people). There are also 104 thousand Jews in Ukraine, that make up 0.2% of the population.

Protestant churches make up about one quarter of all registered religious organizations (27%). The All-Ukrainian Union of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists (AUC ECB) is the Largest.



There are 44 Baptist churches and 2,060 church members on the Crimean Peninsula that has been annexed by the Russian Federation. 86 Baptist churches exist at the occupied territories of Luhansk and Donetsk regions whose members account for 4,638. Half a dozen churches in the conflict zones lack pastors and priests. Over 1,500 church members from Eastern Ukraine, who escaped from war to peaceful regions, wish to return back home to their local churches once hostilities cease.



It is worth pointing out that the Union is comprised of 2,284 churches and 341 church groups with a total membership of 115 thousand people. Over the past two decades of Ukraine's independence (1991-2016) the Union has founded 1,096 new churches.

«Orthodoxy or death!»

he struggle for people's hearts and minds continues in Crimea. The occupied eastern territories are targeted by the strong Russian propaganda. There has been religious persecution and high restrictions during the ongoing military conflict. In May 2014, the so-called DNR declared the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate to be the main religious body of the region. The unlawful armed groups under the banners of the Russian Orthodox Army and the Cossack Army openly manifested their adherence to orthodoxy and began a 'crusade' across the Donbas region. Their public banners and signs said: "Orthodoxy or death!".

Last year, Ihor Plotnytskyi, leader of the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) instructed the Government committee for religious affairs of LNR to check other religious communities, or sects, as they say. Mr. Plotnytskyi reminded about the freedom of religion and ordered to take sects under special control. The situation is the same on all occupied territories of Donetsk region and the Crimean peninsula.



500th Anniversary of the Reformation or «recognition of outstanding contribution»

n this context August 26 of 2016 became a remarkable date. The President of Ukraine signed the decree "On celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in Ukraine." The decree says the following: "With a

purpose to recognize the outstanding contributions of Protestant churches and religious organizations and the role they played in the development of religious, cultural and social spheres of Ukraine, as an expression of respect to their role in Ukrainian history and formation of independent Ukraine."

We are proud of the country where our President is ready to sign a decree aimed at "recognizing outstanding contribution" the religious movement has, even though it unites only 3% of the

The situation in Ukraine is extremely different from the one in Russia with its strong prevailing church subordinated to the state in large extent.

general population. This decree as no other thing illustrates the high level of religious freedom in modern Ukraine.



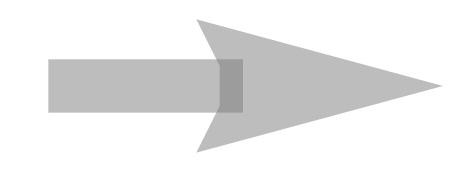
Special Area of Ministry



Change in ATO map from the beginning to February 2017













More than one thousand tons of humanitarian aid has been sent including food packages, personal hygiene products for adults and children, fruits and vegetables, ceramic heaters, thermals, water heaters etc. More than 465 tons of coal and wood were bought and handed to those in need of heating. Over 38 thousand people were served with food in church canteens. All this was possible due to the help of Ukrainian and foreign Baptist churches, charitable organizations and funds.



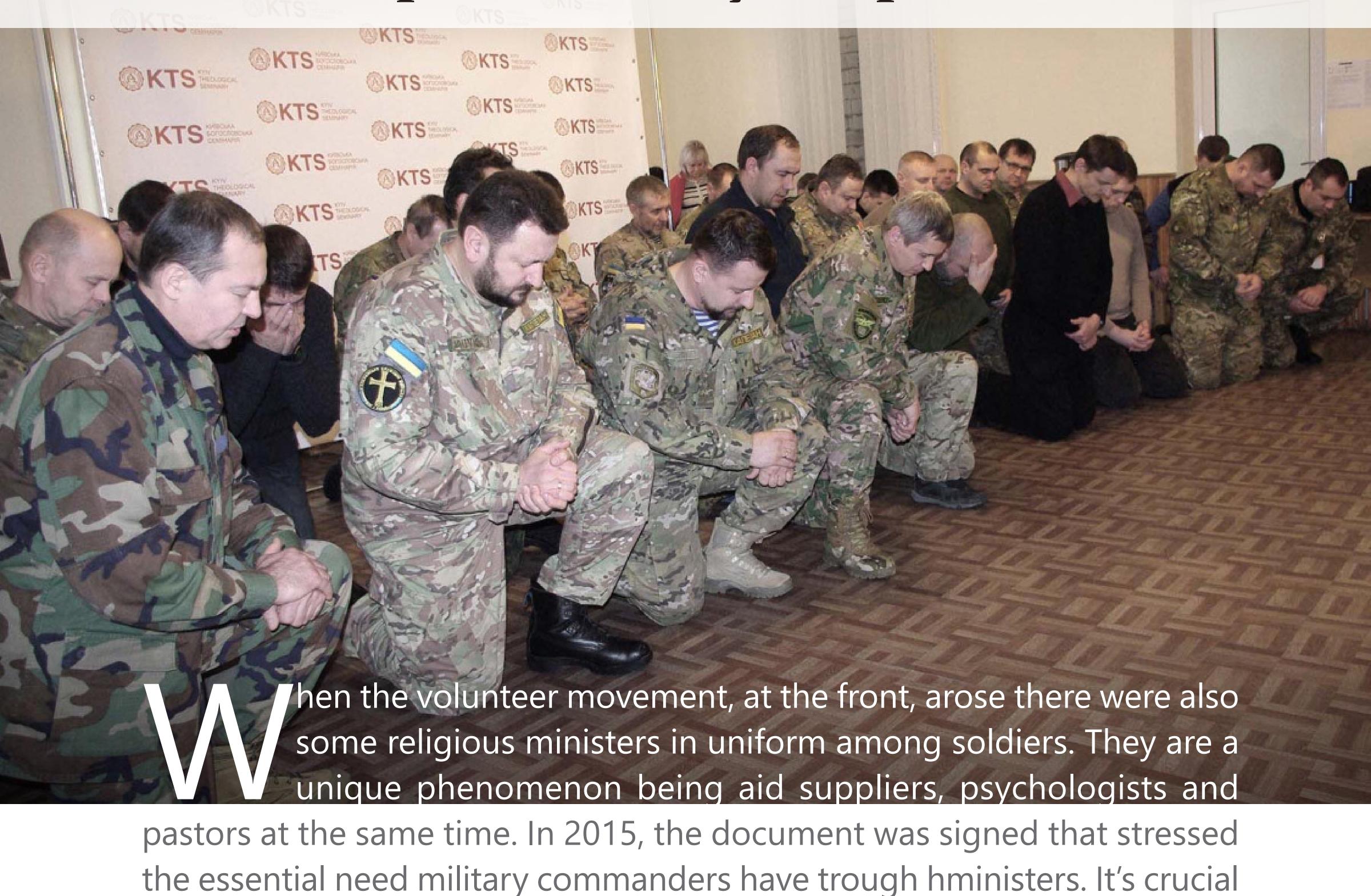








Baptist Military Chaplains



The Baptist Union in Ukraine supports several dozen chaplains. Today, more than ever, the military, their families and other residents of conflict zones need pastoral counseling, moral support and social assistance.

for ATO soldiers and military hospitals to receive this kind of assistance.

Victims of the Military Aggression against Ukraine

t least 7,500 civilians were killed during the conflict. According to the Armed Forces of Ukraine more than 14 thousand anti-government mercenaries, separatists and Russian military have fallen. 2,200 of Ukrainian soldiers were killed in battle. More than 23,000 people have been injured or disabled during ATO.

Avdiivka

Старобільськ

ot a day goes by without us remembering the ongoing conflict. Not only are the problems unsolved, but they are aggravated. The small town of Avdiivka, situated 13 km north of Donetsk proves it. On January 31, the town had to be evacuated due to attack. The population of the town is 35 thousand people. During the active conflict in 2014-2015 only 8 thousand remained, later on people started to come back. According to the latest data around 22 thousand live in the town.



This winter the shelling did not abate for several days. A state of emergency was declared because the situation degraded, with no electricity, running water and freezing temperatures a humanitarian disaster was inevitable. The control headquarters was preparing to evacuate 12 thousand people to the settlements nearby. It was impossible to repair the damaged facilities for a week because of ongoing attacks. 11 warming centers have been opened in Avdiivka: 3 fixed and 8 mobile.

Technicians managed to repair the damage and restore power in Avdiivka by February 5. Fortunately, 500 children now may attend schools and kindergartens, shops and hospital are open, though the suburbs still experience regular shelling. Some residents have already left homes, unfortunately the exact number cannot be determined. About 2 thousand people left on their own. As for now the maintenance crews restored 80 buildings: repaired windows with film, roofs coated with boards. It's the least they could do during those several days under conditions of war.

Economic Pain of Ukraine



umerous economic problems have exasperated, as well as new ones spawned by Russia's aggressive policy. After the long and exhausting confrontation of the Maidan revolution against Viktor Yanukovych's regime and its negative effect on Ukraine's economy, the annexation of Crimea and the possibility of military intervention in southeastern Ukraine's economy collapsed under these threats. All regions of Ukraine suffer from economic crisis. We are still on the list of the world's most corrupt countries. Prices for electricity, gas, water, food and clothing are subject to constant inflation and as a result many people find themselves on the edge of survival. This is particularly so with large families, the elderly, people with disabilities and the indigent.

Ukrainians in Times of Military Conflict



hese recent years of constant external aggression and internal economic hardships Ukrainians keep sinking deeper into a state of despair, profound sadness, disappointment, dissatisfaction, anxiety, mental stupor, irritation and despair.



Everywhere you look people are disappointed because their expectations are not met, they fear something will aggravate the conflict all the time, they don't have confidence in the future and witness blind populist government policies. This is the background for processes that elevate general feelings of confusion and hopelessness in Ukrainian society.

In this context we are called to be a source of peace, sympathy and love. Being representatives and followers of our God in Ukraine we do our best so that every believer would be a living proof of mutual forgiveness, showed aspiration for peace, promoting spiritual values and Biblical truths. Whereby we will find a way out of economic and political crisis, and we will be able to implement vital reforms.

The Power of Prayer without ceasing



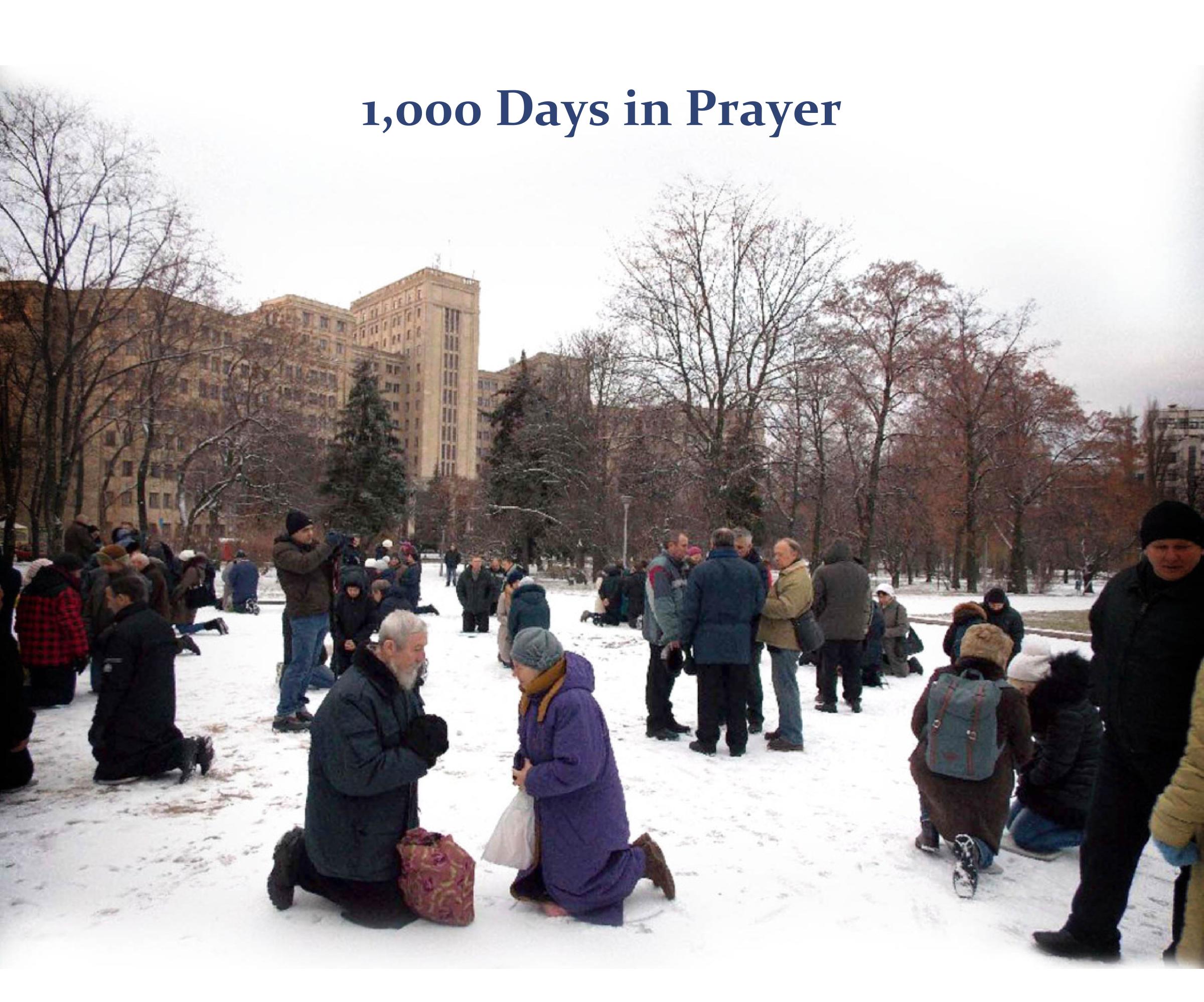
eastern Ukraine impelled many Christians to pray and fast harder for the government and the people. We witnessed how sincere prayers overflow with comprehensive care for the country and motivate us to work. In times of crisis Christians should pray nonstop for its nation and protection from evil.

The crisis inspired many believers and churches, in a social and spiritual way, to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ among hundreds of thousands people.

In such circumstances the Church became closer to society. After all, it is not required to share person's worldview to be beside them, to serve their physical and spiritual needs. What truly matters is to be there for them.



The war made us pray harder. The Baptist Union of Ukraine encourages local churches to have nationwide and intercessory prayers, it calls upon pastors to hold congregational prayers for the country and to initiate street prayers in their towns and villages. "And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace." (Jer. 29:7).



e recall events of 2014 in Kharkiv. The butchery near the regional administration offices, emptied streets and buses, everyone was crippled by fear. As a result, some local Baptists united and hold morning prayers since then on Freedom Square. 1,000 days have passed since that first public prayer!

Many participants share their testimonies of how their lives have changed during the 1,000 days of prayer. Here is one of them: "I really enjoy my morning sleep, but when the fights began I knew right away that I need to pray – God lifts me up early in the morning for the common prayer all these years of war. During this time God has done so much: my cousin was held captive in DNR, and the Lord miraculously saved him! We prayed for him at the square and he returned home safely! In 2017 God gave freedom and peace to the city of Kharkiv".

Please Pray



le kindly ask you to unite in fervent prayer for peace and prosperity in Ukraine, for revival of our nation. Join us in prayers focused on crisis management and stabilization of the current situation – we pray for the unity, integrity and peace in Ukraine, so that God may remove hostility, violence and discord.

If you have a desire and motivation from God, you may join us in this common ministry. It consists of helping family members of the victims fallen in conflict zone; providing for settlers from the East, who found shelter in Baptist churches; helping ministers who serve in conflict areas; providing the necessities for people who live in the flash points. Thanks to your beneficence and generosity the Baptist Union will be able to take care of the wounded, to visit military hospitals, to develop chaplain fellowship ministries and do other important work.

We express our gratitude for your open hearts and thank God in our prayers for your ministry. It warms the cockles of our hearts that you do not forget about Ukraine and share our current problems.

We believe that God is generous in His mercy and grace, and will bless Ukraine with spiritual awakening through your prayers, He will not allow total lawlessness, but will let the country emerge from desolation and shame. After all, only our God gives the protection Ukraine needs, only He has the power to heal the wounds of our nation.

More information for your reading:

- BBC News: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38807778
- The Washington Post: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/ukraines-leader-urges-more-sanctions-against-russia/2017/02/21/328e8550-f838-11e6-aa1e-5f735ee31334_story.html?utm_term=.a23aa223008b
- Atlantic Council: http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/putin-learns-the-hard-way-that-crimean-crime-does-not-pay
- UNICEF: https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ukraine_newsline.html
- World Food Programme: http://www1.wfp.org/countries/ukraine
- The Daily Signal: http://dailysignal.com/2016/10/20/i-dont-have-anyone-left-what-life-is-like-for-refugees-in-ukraine/
- SPIEGEL ONLINE: http://www.spiegel.de/thema/ukraine_konflikt/
- Frankfurter Allgemeine: http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/thema/ukraine-krise
- **KyivPost:** https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/ukraine-politics/unicef-goodwill-ambassador-orlando-bloom-visits-schools-damaged-by-war-in-donbas-413136.html
- Foreign Policy: http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/02/06/backing-into-world-war-iii-russia-china-trump-obama/?utm_content=buffer70634&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer

For more information about our ministry, please contact us at: **Ukrpost.ecb@gmail.com** If you have any questions, please feel free to email us anytime.

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