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Study guide

Accompaniment amid crisis

Relationships, service make connections during Ukrainian war

By Robert C. Blezard

From the beginning of Russia's unprovoked and illegal invasion of Ukraine in February, Lutherans have joined the worldwide effort to help, with generous donations of money, goods and service. The outpouring of support is a tangible way to love our neighbor in need.

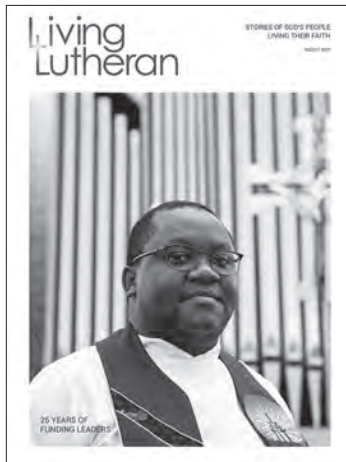
EXERCISE 1: THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Jesus' familiar parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) teaches us about our need to reach out to neighbors in need. In light of the invasion of Ukraine, it's helpful to revisit the parable to see what insights may apply. Begin by reading Luke 10:25-37.

- Looking at only verses 25-28, what is the teaching about loving neighbor as self? Why is this important? What is at stake in loving neighbor as self?
- In verse 29, the lawyer asks for a clarification. What is the lawyer's concern behind this question?
- In what ways is the issue "Who is my neighbor?" one that is asked by every Christian of every age?
- Have you or your congregation ever grappled with "Who is my neighbor?" What have you determined?
- Answering the lawyer's question, Jesus begins the parable in verse 30. What do we know about the man who was victimized on the road?
 - Was he rich or poor?
 - Was he a Jew, a Gentile—or even a Roman?
 - Was he a good man or a bad man?
 - Why might Jesus have not given us details about the victim?
 - Why don't the details about the man matter?
- Three passersby encounter the man, but only one stops to help. Jesus concludes the parable in verses 36 and 37. What are his takeaway lessons in the parable?
- How do you understand Jesus' command found in verse 37: "Go and do likewise"?
- What similarities are there between the Ukrainian people and the man victimized on the road?
- What are some proper responses to our neighbors in Ukraine?

EXERCISE 2: OUTPOURING OF SUPPORT

Lutherans have responded generously to help the crisis in Eastern Europe caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. At press time, Lutheran Disaster Response alone



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had received \$9 million (elca.org/ldr). Lutheran churches have partnered with other agencies, too, and formed networks to help financially and with goods and services. Other Lutherans with ties to Eastern Europe or with special skills to help have ventured to the war-torn areas to pitch in.

- As the war in Ukraine unfolded, how did your congregation discuss the developments? What was the tenor of your discussions? What issues have been the primary focus? Have the discussions continued?
- What do you think of the generous Lutherans who have helped with money, goods or services?
- Have you and your congregation responded to the crisis? In what way? Are your efforts concluded, or are they ongoing? What more might you do?

EXERCISE 3: “THE PEACEMAKERS”

In his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus introduces and summarizes the principles of the kingdom of heaven that has broken into the world with his arrival. He says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

- In declaring peacemakers “blessed” and “children of God,” is Jesus commissioning and calling all of us to be peacemakers? Why or why not?
- How do you understand Jesus’ call for us to be “peacemakers” in the context of our personal relationships and interactions? In the context of community and world?
- How have you been a “peacemaker”? How could you do better?
- What is the aim of peacemakers in a world of conflict and turmoil?
- How do peacemakers engage the world? What primary tools do peacemakers use to accomplish their work?
- Does the call to be a peacemaker require pacifism? Why or why not?
- What might be a peacemaker’s responses to violence against a neighbor?
- What would a Christian peacekeeping role be as it relates to the war in Ukraine?

EXERCISE 4: WAR AND PEACEMAKING

For an extensive look at ethical issues of “just war” and peacemaking, check out the *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* (June 2005, Vol. 5, Issue 6), which explored these topics on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the ELCA social statement “For Peace in God’s World.” The issue contains very thoughtful articles exploring many dimensions and dilemmas of a Christian approach to war and peace (<https://learn.elca.org/jle/issue/june-2005-just-peace-and-just-peacemaking>).

Similarly, study of the 1995 social statement “For Peace in God’s World” can provide insight for reflection and action (elca.org/socialstatements).

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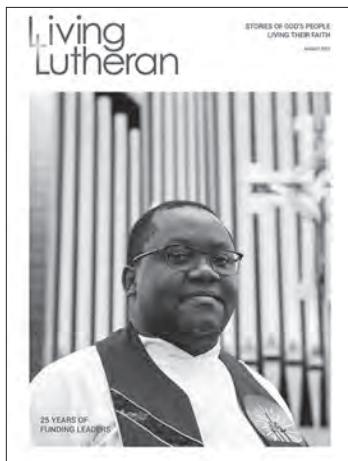
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EXERCISE 5: WELCOME THE STRANGER

The war in Ukraine has caused the largest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II. The United Nations' refugee agency reports that 8 million Ukrainians are internally displaced, and 6.5 million have crossed into neighboring countries, including Poland, Hungary and Moldova. The Bible doesn't use the term "refugee," but Scripture repeatedly calls God's people to welcome and care for the "stranger," the "foreigner" or the "alien" in our midst. Discuss:

- Using an online Bible search site, look for instances of the words "foreigner," "stranger" or "alien" (perhaps smaller subgroups could work on these words). What does the Bible say about these people? How are God's people expected to treat them?
- Looking at just one Scripture, consider Matthew 25:35 and explore its implications.
- In what ways are the refugees fleeing Ukraine the new strangers in our midst?
- Given the Bible's instruction, how should Christians receive and help Ukrainian refugees? How could you help? Your congregation? Your synod? Our denomination?
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service is helping Ukrainians (and those of many other nationalities) to settle in the United States. Why is this work important? Why should we support LIRS? (For more study and information, check out lirs.org.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Who is to blame for the war in Ukraine? What did/do you think of Vladimir Putin's reasons for invading Ukraine? Are the Western forces (including the United States) justified in sending weapons and other aid to the Ukrainians? Why or why not? Should we do more? Why or why not? If so, what? If you were the president or a leader in Congress, what would you recommend, and why? How would that action fit with your Christian faith?
- How has the war in Ukraine affected you? Your congregation? Your community? What connections to Ukraine or Eastern Europe exist in your community or area? How have you, your friends and your congregation discussed the issue?
- The war in Ukraine is lasting much longer than anybody expected when it first began in February. How has your opinion of or support for Ukraine changed in that time? How has media coverage changed since then? How much of a danger exists that people will get tired of hearing about it and begin withdrawing support? If that happens, what would be a proper response?
- How have you and your congregation worked on behalf of Ukrainians? What more could you do? Why should you do it?



Accompaniment Amid Crisis

**RELATIONSHIPS, SERVICE MAKE
CONNECTIONS DURING WAR**

By Brenda Martin

Hungarian Interchurch Aid, a member of Lutheran Disaster Response partner ACT Alliance, assists Ukrainian refugees at an aid station on the Ukrainian-Hungarian border.

Since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, ELCA members have dug deep into their pockets. Louisa Ishida, program communicator for Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR), reported that at press time its Eastern Europe Crisis Response had raised \$9 million.

Yet there are other stories, too, of Lutherans responding to the ongoing war and helping people whose lives have been upended. In one case, a friendship forged 20 years earlier at a Lutheran camp in southwestern Pennsylvania provided two families in Ukraine with an escape route to Germany. And back in the United States, a military veteran in Minnesota upended his life to become a long-term volunteer, delivering humanitarian aid near Lviv, in western Ukraine.

A personal connection

Christoph Kasch is from Germany, Igor Kyrpa from Ukraine. The two men met in 2001, when both were counselors at Camp Lutherlyn in Butler, Pa., and their friendship endured.

Kyrpa, a neurosurgeon, lives in Dnipro, an eastern Ukrainian city with a population of nearly 1 million. He said his wife, Julia, and their three children packed their bags—one suitcase each—months before the invasion began.

When Kyrpa sent the family to take refuge in Germany, he emailed Kasch, explaining that they were en route and asking him to be a friend, a caregiver and possibly a father to his children.

Kasch said there was never a question that he and his wife, Marianne, whom he also met at Camp Lutherlyn, wouldn't help. "Igor didn't ask us—he told us," Marianne Kasch said. "He told us he sent them this morning and they're on their way."

The Kasches had bought a large house in 2021 that they had planned to renovate and open as a bed-and-breakfast. They hadn't started the renovation and had only days to create livable space for Kyrpa's family, as well as their friend, Natalya Shynkarenko, and her two children.

Rather than just prepare bedrooms, the Kasches decided to transform the second floor of the house into an apartment, putting up walls for three bedrooms, a common living space and a kitchenette so that the two families could have privacy and a sense of independence. The apartment renovation was completed in one weekend.

Marianne Kasch said the family also received a lot more help, both physical and financial. Her sister came up with the idea of opening a PayPal account where people could donate to help with construction costs. Within

“It’s a good example of how relationships and community come together in times of need.”

a week it reached \$20,000, the maximum amount allowed on the platform. Bank accounts were set up for both families.

In Oil City, Pa., Marianne's mother, Beth Orris, is choir director of Good Hope Lutheran Church, and through this contact, congregations in northwestern Pennsylvania also jumped in to help the families.

Grace Lutheran Church in Franklin, Pa., donated money for bikes or scooters to get the children to school, and other congregations collected money as well. "It's sometimes nice to have a personal connection and know the people who you're helping," said Chris Curran, president of Grace's council.

"Our church leadership didn't need to organize anything," said Sandra Jones, a pastor of Good Hope. "It's a good example of how relationships and community come together in times of need. People contributed as they felt moved. It was very lovely to see."

Christoph Kasch called the effort not a sprint but a marathon, as volunteers try to help the families become independent, learn German, get established in school and work through that country's social system. "Our goal is to support our friends to start a new life," he added.

For now, Marianne Kasch said, "It's nice for us to have a bigger family."

Kyrpa remains in Ukraine, where he continues to work every day. He said his hospital



Photo: Courtesy of Marianne Kasch

When Igor Kyrpa's family fled Ukraine, his friends Christoph and Marianne Kasch, whom he met at Camp Lutherlyn in Butler, Pa., took them into their home in Germany. ELCA congregations have financially contributed to the family's settlement there.

is treating many wounded people, adding, "I have to work because my country needs me and my experience."

When he's not working, he's taking German classes in anticipation of joining his family at some point. "I see no way to come back here," he added.

Kyrpa worries, too, that the world will move on from Ukraine's troubles. Even now, months into the war, he said, "I don't know what will be tomorrow."

A call to serve

Mark Lindquist, a member of Zion Lutheran Church, Ortonville, Minn., said the call to service he heard growing up in the ELCA was what led him to self-fund a long-term volunteer trip to Ukraine that began in April and will likely extend through at least the end of this year. Remembering the service activities that were part of his experience at the 1997 Youth Gathering in New Orleans, he said, "This is where I was called to serve others."

A U.S. Air Force veteran, Lindquist arrived in Poland on April 1 but didn't get through the border into Ukraine until April 5. When he arrived, he said, the line of refugees waiting to enter Poland was 48 hours deep.

The last time he was at the border, he saw another line of people waiting to enter Ukraine as some refugees returned to areas now deemed safer.

Originally Lindquist had planned to serve in the foreign military volunteer legion, but he decided to become a nonmilitary volunteer when he realized there was little humanitarian aid on the Ukrainian side of the border.

Today he works on a team of volunteers distributing medical supplies and other everyday

essentials to Ukrainians most in need. Zion is also helping to financially support Ukrainians.

An evolving response

As all this unfolded, LDR was accompanying ELCA companion churches and ecumenical partners in their efforts to provide support, supplies and care to people affected by the war. Ishida said the ministry had planned a six-month response to the crisis but is now working on a multiyear effort that will include the extensive rebuilding certain to be needed after the war.

At first, through the Lutheran World Federation, LDR primarily accompanied companion churches in Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine itself in their relief work, as well as supported ACT Alliance and RDGTS-Phiren Amenca in Hungary. But, as Ishida said, "our response has evolved." Now LDR is addressing such long-range challenges as finding housing for the displaced, getting children into schools and providing language classes for them and the adults. †

To help

- Contribute to LDR's Eastern Europe Crisis Response at elca.org/ukraine.
- Support Mark Lindquist's supply-donation efforts at gofundme.com/f/us-veteran-headed-to-ukraine.
- To help settle the families staying with the Kasches, contact bethorris@gmail.com.

Download a study guide at livinglutheran.org by clicking on the "Spiritual practices & resources" tab.