

A CANADIAN PASTORAL LETTER ON

UKRAINE, CANADA AND THE CHURCH

As we approach the second anniversary of Russia's
full-scale invasion of Ukraine

FEBRUARY 24, 2024



AS WE APPROACH THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF RUSSIA'S FULL-SCALE INVASION OF UKRAINE

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INTRODUCTION

This invitation to prayer and action for peace has grown out of a shared journey begun a year ago by Ukrainian Orthodox, Catholic, Evangelical, and other Christian leaders together with the World Evangelical Alliance's Peace & Reconciliation Network, The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, and The Canadian Council of Churches.

Our gatherings have explored the spiritual and historical backdrop of the conflict in Ukraine, the ongoing realities faced by Ukrainians who have been welcomed to Canada, and the prospects for peace in Ukraine. We have spent dedicated time in prayer.

Together we call all Christians and people of good will to join in united prayer and action for peace.



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PEACE IN AND FOR UKRAINE

As we approach the second anniversary of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and the tenth anniversary of Russia’s infiltration into Eastern Ukraine and annexation of Crimea, the need and desire for peace have become more and more evident. Without in any way minimizing or ignoring the suffering and sorrow caused by war and violence in other areas of the world, we stand together in inviting Christians and all people of good will to prayerfully consider how we are all called, and might contribute to, the achievement of peace in and for Ukraine.



In the words crafted by the Commission on Justice and Peace of The Canadian Council of Churches:

Peace is a dynamic state of well-being and harmony —right relationships among people and nature where there is no fear. Nothing and no one is excluded from God’s vision of peace; it includes all nations, cultures, and peoples, the whole inhabited Earth, indeed the whole cosmos. The quest for peace is at the heart of ecumenism and the shared path of reconciliation, of walking one another home.

The Canadian Council of Churches,
“[Principles of Peace](#),” May 2018.

Not since World War II has Europe experienced the violence and destruction it now witnesses as a result of Russia's invasion. Our entire world has been affected by the Ukrainian refugee crisis, the economic fallout, and the difficulty of exporting Ukrainian agricultural products (which is felt especially hard in the Global South).

The level of human suffering is massive. Hundreds of thousands of military personnel on both sides have been killed or wounded. Ukrainian civilians and civilian infrastructure—in violation of international norms—have been targeted resulting in the loss of power, water, heat, shelter, and life. Basic human rights and freedoms have been and continue to be violated, including the right to religious freedom. Of special concern is the forced removal of children from their homes and families.

The environmental impact on God's world has been enormous. The structural challenges of food security and the destruction of environmental infrastructure, such as the Kakhovka Dam, have resulted in long term challenges to ecosystems, characterized by some as "ecocide." The restoration of the Ukrainian ecosphere will take decades.



We call upon the leaders of the Russian Federation to terminate this war, to cease this unjust aggression, end the violence being perpetrated against Ukraine and its people, and to recall their military forces from within the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine—including Crimea—immediately.

THE HOPE OF THE UKRAINIAN PEOPLE

Those who have been forced to flee the country are now refugees trying to survive in a strange society. Comprising for the most part women and children, they are separated from everything familiar to them, especially from their families, husbands, and fathers. The challenges and traumas Ukrainians have endured in their homeland, as well as their displacement throughout Canada and the world will continue to affect them for generations.

One of God's greatest gifts is freedom. Ukraine suffered under imperial domination for centuries, during which Ukrainian culture, language, and spirituality were suppressed. In defending the freedom of their country, Ukrainians seek that which we, as Canadians, often take for granted—the respect for human rights, rule of law, peace, international order, and the positive appreciation for the unique gift of the Other, their language, their culture, and their spirituality.

Not since World War II has Europe experienced the violence and destruction it now witnesses as a result of Russia's invasion.

We stand united with the leaders of the Christian Churches of Ukraine who, in their declaration of January 10, 2024, condemned the "Russian World" ideology that has been and continues to be used by leaders of the Russian Federation and the Russian Orthodox Church as a pretext for Russia's invasion of Ukraine.*

* "Heads of Ukrainian Churches condemn the ideology of the "Russian world."
<https://irf.in.ua/p/116>

“ONE OF GOD’S GREATEST GIFTS IS FREEDOM.”

*A Canadian Pastoral Letter on
Ukraine, Canada and the Church*

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Given the horrific and brutal nature of war, we ask ourselves: “What is God calling us, as Canadian Christians, to do?” For if one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it (1 Corinthians 12:26). What is God calling us to do? Simply put: “Whatever we can, wherever we are.” Everyone has a role to play.

1. PRAY

Pray. First of all, we are called to offer our prayers to the Triune God of Peace: prayers for the cessation of hostilities, prayers for peace, prayers for reconciliation, prayers for healing.

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We encourage all Canadian Christians to pray scripture over the realities of this and every conflict, naming specific prayer needs, including the reality of the spiritual power for good over evil and light over darkness which impacts us all personally on the emotional, psychological, societal, and spiritual levels.

With our spiritual forebears we exclaim “Come, Lord Jesus” as He promised He would (Revelation 22:20).

Common prayer in the context of regular worship services as well as denominational and ecumenical prayer networks can be very powerful, for in this way we honour Jesus’ prayer, “May they be one, as we are one” (John 17:21). Remembering that Jesus Himself said “of myself I can do nothing,” let us commit this journey of suffering, justice-seeking, and love to the Lord, our God, in faith and unity (1 Samuel 17:47).

2. SUPPORT UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

During our shared journey, we have been struck repeatedly by the stories of regular, “everyday” Canadians who have helped and supported Ukrainian refugees personally, emotionally, socially, spiritually, and materially. The importance of offering them the hand of friendship and helping foster community both with and for them cannot be overestimated.

It is especially important that church leaders take every opportunity to encourage this ongoing faithful holistic support to Ukraine and Ukrainians, thanking those both within and beyond their congregations for the amazing level of help and support they have offered and continue to offer Ukrainian refugees.

3. URGE DIPLOMATIC STEPS TOWARDS A JUST AND SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN UKRAINE

Neither can we overemphasize the need to continue to lobby our government officials on the local, provincial, and federal levels. It is imperative that our leaders do all that they can diplomatically to help achieve a just and sustainable peace for Ukraine; to make it possible for Ukrainians to stay in Ukraine; and to assist Ukrainian refugees in returning to Ukraine when it will be safe to do so. Along with diplomacy, it is right for our government to offer continued humanitarian support. Along with immediate aid for Ukraine, resources should be provided for creative ways to make peace and work toward just relational, governmental, and economic structures in the region.

4. SEEK COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIPS OF HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT

Ukrainian and Slavic Christian congregations in Canada (Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Free, Evangelical, Pentecostal, or Independent) have served as “first response” centres during this refugee crisis. Fostering cooperative relationships between other Canadian churches and these congregations is an especially effective way to enhance humanitarian support and ecumenical engagement. These new relationships, forged in the context of suffering, can be nurtured over the long term to the mutual benefit of all.

5. REMEMBER FEBRUARY 24

As we approach the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion in February, let us continue to intentionally engage in local relationships with Ukrainian and Slavic Churches; to encourage every Canadian church to bring Ukrainians and their stories into their churches with focused prayer; and to invite denominations and prayer networks to support Ukrainian civic organizations and carry prayers into public gatherings on February 24.

6. HOPE FOR RECONCILIATION

While for many today the wounds—seen and unseen—are simply too raw to contemplate reconciliation, it is imperative that we never lose sight of the long-term process involved and the ultimate hope for peace. The aggression and destruction need to stop. The killing of innocent people—including children—needs to stop. Then we can begin to hope for just restitution. While no human court can bring justice as God does, we need the spiritual hope that comes from repentance, truth telling, empathic listening, making reparation, offering forgiveness, building trust, and making new promises. We acknowledge the courage of all those—especially citizens of the Russian Federation—who have spoken out against the war and are eager to work for peace.



We offer our prayers that the sufferings and innocent loss of life caused by this war will be brought to a swift end. We pray that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, will be with all those who are suffering, and with us, as we wait in hopeful expectation.

May truth and mercy meet. May justice and peace kiss (Psalm 85:10).

This pastoral statement has been prepared and is endorsed by The Canadian Council of Churches, The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, and the Peace and Reconciliation Network of the World Evangelical Alliance. Canadian church leaders have endorsed this Canadian pastoral statement as follows:



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