



United Church of God an International Association

eNews from Ministerial and Member Services

Issue 513
April 7, 2022

Personal From the President...

Finding Hope Amidst a Devouring Fire

“A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns; the land is like the Garden of Eden before them, and *behind them a desolate wilderness*; surely nothing shall escape” (Joel 2:3, emphasis added throughout).

This passage describing the prophesied Great Tribulation may not yet have reached fulfillment, but for millions of Ukrainians, the past five weeks have surely delivered a bitter foretaste. As Russia shifts its invasion force to the energy-rich eastern Ukraine, relentless reports of barbaric assaults against innocent Ukrainian civilians fill news media accounts nearly everywhere.

Given that I have personal family relationships in Ukraine and also that Bev and I have long-standing experience in helping children and Sabbatarian groups in the region, the news continues to be painful beyond description.

For us, to watch the news from Ukraine is akin to viewing a CGI-enhanced horror show in slow motion. Only with Ukraine, there are *no* CGI special effects. The photos and videos all reflect unspeakable atrocities in real time.

Incomprehensible financial accounts of Russian-inflicted damage are now starting to appear. While admitting upfront that “the true extent of the devastation in Ukraine will be a lot worse,” the British *Economist* magazine cites current financial costs tallied by the Kyiv School of Economics (KSE). As of April 1, physical damage in Ukraine has exceeded at least \$68 billion.

But unfathomable numbers are emerging. Soon-to-come estimates of the devastation are expected to *exceed half a trillion dollars* and higher. As the *Economist* reports: “There has been at least \$58 billion worth of damage to transport infrastructure. Some 196 health-care facilities have been destroyed, which will cost another \$2 billion to rebuild. These numbers

are incomplete: economic losses, destruction of livestock and crops, and a shrinking workforce as people flee are not included. Ukraine's Ministry of Economy and KSE estimate that total losses could range from \$564 billion to \$600 billion, or 2.8 to 3 times its GDP in 2021."

But it gets even more incomprehensible when one considers the fact that more than *five million* Ukrainians (women, children and senior men) have *already* fled the vicious Russian onslaught.

Five million people can be a hard-to-understand abstraction when one personally knows the people and the pain that is deeply felt and shared.

Former U.S. General David Petraeus noted this week that "Ukraine has won the battles of Kyiv, Chernihiv and Sumy." But at what cost? This is where it gets personal.

As I have mentioned previously, Chernihiv is the city of 285,000 where we—through the LifeNets humanitarian organization—have supported the Revival Centre for Disabled Children for more than a quarter of a century. It is but 30 miles from the shuttered Chernobyl nuclear plant.

We continue to receive heartrending reports as miraculously the Centre has continued to serve 50 children and others, despite the devastating Russian pounding of Chernihiv (70% of the city is destroyed from rocket and mortar attacks)! Operating despite the loss of almost all electricity, gas and water (all during 40–50°F weather), the staff has constructed makeshift cooking areas and dug latrines in the once-beautiful gardens. Their inspiring dedication is truly encouraging and gives us hope!

Our medical contacts have urgently requested inverters to convert battery power to AC current which, through LifeNets connections, we are purchasing and transporting through Poland and hopefully soon over the Ukrainian border. We have been able to get some food to these people as the Russians have retreated from Chernihiv. Your prayers for success will be appreciated here.

We have also heard from my family members there, some of whom have reached comparative safety, thank God! All the windows in my cousin's Kharkiv home had been blown out by compression blasts from Russian bombing. He lamented to me about the national pain when now there is not a moment when someone is not getting killed or raped. There has been no news from my cousin's nephew, who was in the region of the Kharkiv air strikes two weeks ago. Recovery of bodies from the destroyed city center is continuing as families are identifying their loved ones at the morgues.

The Ukrainian Sabbatarian groups with whom we have long worked live in the comparative safety of western Ukraine. In an inspiring development, they have converted their church buildings to accommodate beds and living areas for refugees!

We remain in contact with a number of other Ukrainians, including former homeless “street children” whom LifeNets helped from 2001 to 2016. One of them is happily married and refuses to evacuate. The fear of being separated and then not knowing if and when families will be reunited is very real. *Time* magazine and other international media have reported Russia “forcibly taking hundreds of thousands of civilians from shattered Ukrainian cities to Russia,” including at least 80,000 children, taking their passports from them and treating them as hostages.

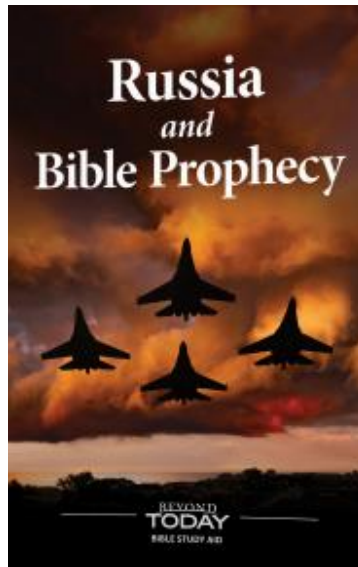
Bev and I also remain humbly grateful for the many offers of help from members of the United Church of God. UCG families both in the United States and Canada have offered to take in Ukrainian refugees. Every day we have had several communications with people throughout Ukraine as we try to find ways to get aid to them. It is all a very trying process in the face of continually shifting conditions.

Is this the “Time of the End”?

Because of my Ukrainian background and the fact that I have made many trips to Russia and the former Soviet Union, I am often asked about Bible prophecy concerning the region. The Church of God community has long shown great interest in the Ezekiel prophecies about “Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal” (Ezekiel 38:2).

Further, the detailed prophecies about the King of the North and the King of the South in the 11th chapter of Daniel have long been the source of much discussion.

Beyond Today TV and magazines have long proclaimed much about these prophecies. A new and important Bible Study Guide with up-to-date information from these sources titled *Russia and Bible Prophecy* is now available for download. It features articles on prophecy and history written by Scott Ashley, Tom Robinson, Mario Seigle and me. The Bible Study Guide will be featured in the next edition of the *Beyond Today* magazine, together with fresh coverage of the emerging prophetic situation. You can download it here ucg.org/bible-study-tools/booklets/russia-and-bible-prophecy.



When people ask me “Is this the time of the end?” the short answer is: not yet.

Gog and Magog symbolize sinister actions by exceptionally large nation-states in both the coming end times and also at the end of the prophesied millennial rule of Jesus Christ, where they reappear (Revelation 20:8-9). The physical and behavioral characteristics of these prophetic nation-states match up with characteristics of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China. Both countries hold long and bloody histories of genocide, with Mao Zedong himself responsible for an incomprehensible record of causing 45 million deaths during the so-called “Great Leap Forward” from 1958–1962.

So what are we to do in a time today where an initial “devouring fire” has ignited in Ukraine and elsewhere? What do we do when being overrun by injustice?

The apostle Paul has a good answer: “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13, English Standard Version). The Greek word for “watch” literally means to “stay awake.” Jesus Himself gives us a warning and some good news: “because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. *But* the one who *endures* to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:12-13, ESV).

As hostile devouring fire spreads in Europe and Asia, let us be among those who watch, who stand fast, who are courageously strong—and who endure to the end!

I will conclude with Psalm 10, which is a song of confidence in God’s triumph over evil:

“Why do You stand afar off, O LORD? Why do You hide in times of trouble? The wicked in his pride persecutes the poor; let them be caught in the plots which they have devised.

“For the wicked boasts of his heart’s desire; He blesses the greedy and renounces the LORD. The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts.

“His ways are always prospering; Your judgments are far above, out of his sight; as for all his enemies, he sneers at them. He has said in his heart, ‘I shall not be moved; I shall never be in adversity.’ His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue is trouble and iniquity.

“He sits in the lurking places of the villages; in the secret places he murders the innocent; his eyes are secretly fixed on the helpless. He lies in wait secretly, as a lion in his den; he lies in wait to catch the poor; he catches the poor when he draws him into his net. So he crouches, he lies low, that the helpless may fall by his strength. He has said in his heart, ‘God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see.’

“Arise, O LORD! O God, lift up Your hand! Do not forget the humble. Why do the wicked renounce God? He has said in his heart, ‘You will not require an account.’

“But You have seen, for You observe trouble and grief, to repay it by Your hand. The helpless commits himself to You; You are the helper of the fatherless. Break the arm of the wicked and the evil man; seek out his wickedness until You find none.

“The LORD is King forever and ever; the nations have perished out of His land. LORD, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will prepare their heart; You will cause Your ear to hear, to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may oppress no more.”

In Christ’s service,



Victor Kubik

Personal From Ministerial and Member Services...

Dear ministers and members,

I am convinced that the greatest, most powerful of human emotions is love, true love. It is real, true love that “makes the world go ’round.” It is “love, sweet love” that there’s “just too little of.” Love is, indeed, “a many-splendored thing.” “The power of love is a curious thing; make one man weep, make another man sing.”

Yes, thousands of songs have been written about this most powerful and moving of human emotions. I know the songs I have quoted are a bit dated, so feel free to think of your own favorite love songs.

This emotion of love is a gift from our Creator, for “God is love.” And it is God who wants us to experience love. For true love is God’s love. And there is no better manifestation of love than that of the LORD’s Passover.

In just a week from this evening, we will gather together to keep the LORD’s Passover.

It is love that moved the LORD to institute the first Passover as He was about to lead His chosen people, the children of Israel, out of slavery and bondage.

It is love that is symbolized by the blood of the Lamb that was placed upon the lintels and doorposts of the Israelites’ homes. The LORD passed over their homes and their lives were spared. Why?

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. . .”

It was God’s love that motivated the observance of the first Passover and it was love that moved Jesus Christ to give the symbols of the unleavened bread and wine at the establishing of the New Testament Passover service. It is this love that, ultimately, brings salvation to all human beings who are willing to accept God’s love and share it with others as they become like Him.

If we love God, we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight (1 John 3:22; 5:2-3).

Is it any wonder that it is by love that Christ’s followers, His disciples, are to be known (John 13:35)?

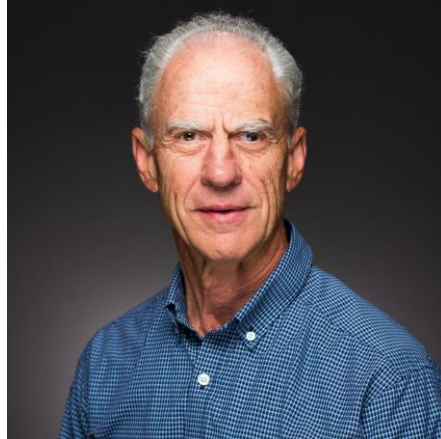
Wishing you all a very inspiring Sabbath day and upcoming Holy Day season!

In God’s love and service,



Mark Welch, Operation Manager for MMS

From Ministerial and Member Services...



Larry Cortelyou

We are sad to announce the death of local elder Larry Cortelyou, of the Central Illinois congregation. He died peacefully in his sleep on the afternoon of Monday, March 21, after months of dealing with health complications. Arrangements were made for a private, family funeral. The family asks you to keep this announcement confidential and not to have it forwarded or posted on social media. Thank you for your continued prayers.

No eNews Next Week

Due to the timing of the Passover service, there will be no edition of the MMS *eNews* published next week. Also, since the Last Day of Unleavened Bread will be on Friday, April 22, the next edition is planned for publication one day earlier than usual, on Wednesday, April 20.

Why Ambassador Bible College?

A Place For Growth and Commitment

Ambassador Bible College begins their mission statement with the goal of “diligently upholding and faithfully teaching the truths of God. . .” In our experience, ABC was the ideal environment to explore, investigate, and question biblical and spiritual truths. ABC also cultivated personal, spiritual, musical and relational growth for us and our classmates.

We are Noah and Sonia Boyd. We graduated together in 2017, and we recently married in June of 2021 (and before you think of an Ambassador “Bridal” College joke, we neither met nor dated at ABC—just for the record!). While we both had different paths that led us to Cincinnati for nine months, we agree that ABC is an excellent consideration for a variety of reasons.

Before ABC, I (Sonia) had gotten baptized and completed my first year of university. I chose to attend ABC thinking, like many before me, that it would help me build a spiritual foundation. I believed in the God of the Bible and had repented of my sins, but I still felt that I had questions and doubts about aspects of my faith. Prior to my arrival, I had gotten the advice of other alumni to ask as many questions as possible. I took that to heart; the more answers I sought, the more I began to see a deeper commitment in myself to serving God and His people.

Meanwhile, I (Noah) applied to ABC under the impression that it would be a fun, prolonged camp-like experience. I had yet to become serious about my calling from God, despite being in the Church from age 12. However, God used the content from classes to awaken and eventually prompt me to answer that calling. I was baptized the morning of graduation day and have since experienced the powerful understanding and guidance that comes from God's Spirit. While it is beneficial to attend ABC post-baptism and use the gift of God's Spirit to study His Word, God also works with those who, like myself, had not yet fully committed to Him.

We both encourage those in any stage of their relationship with God to consider investing in the ABC experience to seek truth and spiritual growth. We have seen indelible growth in ourselves and each other, and can both attest to ABC's lasting impact.

—Noah and Sonia Boyd, ABC Class of 2017

Inside United Podcast



Victor Kubik and Scott Buchanan—The Russian Invasion, Part 2

Recent Media hire Scott Buchanan joins the podcast today to chat with Victor Kubik about his close ties to Ukraine as we see the Russian invasion enter a second month.

ucg.org/inside-united-podcast/inside-united-podcast-240-victor-kubik-scott-buchanan-the-russian-invasion-part-2

Send us your questions, comments, or suggestions at podcast@ucg.org.

Listen to past episodes: ucg.org/inside-united-podcast

Pray for the Gospel to Have Free Course

(2 Thes. 3:1 KJV)

UPDATE: The needs of God's people and work in Myanmar – Part 1

In the Dec. 16, 2021, issue of the *eNews*, we mentioned that due to military hostilities in parts of Myanmar, money sent by LifeNets to help our brethren had not been accessible since banks were closed. This problem has since been partially resolved so some funds from LifeNets and others can now be obtained. Thank you for your prayers in this regard.

The brethren are generally safe and doing well. However, some of the younger adults in the congregation feel a bit frustrated since they would like to get moving in life and education—to learn more about technology, finance, business and obtain employment. But the nation is still nearly at a standstill due to the ongoing conflict. A few young people are trying to obtain two-year contracts to work in Singapore and Malaysia, but the Myanmar military government is slow to issue permits, passports and other documentation.

Also, several of the brethren who are farmers have long-standing debts with friends and neighbors mostly due to crops that had failed at some point in the past. Since access to money is very limited for the debtholders, they are asking repayment on the loans. Since most of the debts are reasonably small, we are guiding the members through these concerns. *Your prayers* for the brethren and the resolution to all of the above-mentioned issues would be greatly appreciated.

—Peter Eddington, Operation Manager, Media and Communications Services

Milwaukee Young Adult Weekend—May 28–30

Young adults from across the country are invited to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, this Memorial Day weekend (May 28–30, 2022) to meet other young adults, engage in Bible study, and sightsee in the Milwaukee area. We invite those aged 18-30 for this exciting weekend. Registration may be completed at milwaukeeyaweekend.com—there will be a cap of 50 people. Pricing will be \$85 before May 1, and \$100 after May 1. The cost will cover food and some activities for the weekend. Housing options include camping (free), staying in brethren's homes (free) and local hotels (\$70–\$130/night). We hope you can join us for a lively weekend of fellowship, mingling and fun activities!

Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Weekend Report

The Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas, congregations hosted a Family Regional Weekend with the theme “Developing A Servant’s Heart,” March 11–13. Approximately 170 brethren from 10 different states, including guest speakers Jorge de Campos and Ben Light, assembled to forge new acquaintances and renew old friendships while participating in activities.



The weekend was kicked off by a service project at the North Texas Food Bank, followed by a mouth-watering dessert social on Friday evening. On the Sabbath, a teen hospitality hour was followed by interactive preteen, teen and adult Bible studies related to the theme. The adult Bible study, “Let this mind be in you. . .,” was given by Jorge de Campos while Matthew McDonald facilitated the teen Bible study, “What Does Serving Look Like?”

After lunch, Ben Light gave the sermon “Ordinary Men . . . Extraordinary God.” Musical highlights included hymn accompaniment by a multigenerational instrumental ensemble and special music by a combined DFW-Phoenix, AZ, teen vocal ensemble. Graduating seniors were honored in a slideshow presentation. Willing hands and hearts joined together to coordinate delicious meals over the course of the weekend.



The “Starry Night” themed prom was attended by over 50 teens, who enjoyed a catered dinner and danced the night away under the twinkling lights of the ballroom. Meanwhile, remaining brethren dined together at the church hall, and preteens enjoyed activity stations, a dance party and movie. It truly was a night to remember! Sunday, brethren gathered to fellowship and play volleyball, basketball and dodgeball.

Thank you to all who attended and all who extended hearts of service to make the weekend a reality! The local charity to which donated goods were given is most appreciative.

Mark your calendars for next year’s DFW Regional Weekend, scheduled for March 10–12, 2023!

—The Reinoso family