



Report - July 2022

Reformed Church in Transcarpathia, Ukraine

The Reformed Church in Transcarpathia is an officially registered church in Ukraine. It is composed of 3 dioceses/presbyteries. In the three dioceses we have a total of 108 congregations, led by 75 pastors, including 12 women. The Reformed Church has 64,000 members, nearly 8,000 young persons participating in religious education and about 1,500 youngsters attending confirmation preparations. The Church runs and maintains 18 kindergartens, 4 secondary schools, a children's home, 2 rehabilitation centres for disabled children, a diaconal centre for complex social services including bakery and social kitchen's network, a home for the elderly, volunteer fire brigades, a ministry to addicted persons, a home care service, a Roma school programme, 3 conference centres and for administration and coordination of all these activities in parishes and institution the headquarters (Bishop's office).

Unfortunately, the war that broke out on 24 February 2022 caused great damage to the life of the parishes, as many fled the country out of fear of being affected by the war and being drafted in the military. Mostly old people were left behind, or young mothers with their children. Transcarpathia has hosted more than 400 000 refugees in various institutions, private accommodations, kindergartens and schools. Many refugees also received daily care in the institutions of the Reformed Church, where they have been welcomed and taken care of with great love and affection. They are offered weekly worship services in Ukrainian and, where they stay for a longer period of time, they are also provided with Hungarian-language education by local parishes, whose mother tongue is Hungarian.

The Diaconal Centre of the Church sends weekly humanitarian shipments with in-kind donations to the interior parts of Ukraine. Their bakery bakes and distributes hundreds of loaves of bread every day to the needy and to the refugees (internally displaced persons) who have found shelter in our institutions and local congregations. The social kitchen provides over 100 additional hot meals a day to the elderly and disadvantaged families.

In cooperation with representatives of the Protestant churches in Ukraine and a Ukrainian charity, we regularly send durable food to war-torn areas in Kharkiv, Kyiv, Borodyanka, Irpin, Sloviansk and many other places. We are always shocked and disheartened by the pictures and videos sent to us by our local colleagues who witness buildings and areas destroyed by bombs and shelling in person. So many people need help and support.

The pastors of our local churches (parishes) are doing their best to make sure that those left behind are taken care for. Prayer meetings for peace have been organised in the congregations, just like summer camps for young children – members of the church and refugee children -, 3 or 5 day confirmation camps in small groups. They look after the elderly, those left alone, the

disadvantaged families and orphans. Our pastors also carry a heavy burden, but trusting in God they try to remain in their local communities and continue serving faithfully, for which we are extremely grateful. The events of the past 4 months have created doubts in the minds of parents and unfortunately many are planning to leave the country.

From 1 September 2022 on, only educational institutions with properly equipped bomb shelters/bunkers will be allowed to re-open, which represents another huge challenge for our community. Since the mother tongue of the members of our congregations is Hungarian, we have been facing many difficulties and restrictions already, due to the abolition of minority language rights and the language law. The outbreak of war has put an even greater burden on the people of this area, who have always had to struggle to survive as a minority.

The leadership of the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia, seeing the situation created by the war and not even really assessing the losses we have suffered, is working to ensure the survival of the parishes and educational institutions here. Unfortunately, the war has presented us with challenges that are beyond our human and financial capacities. The churches have been weakened by the members fleeing the war for neighbouring countries, which is a great concern for our future. The spiritual and mental care and the education of those who have remained at home is an even greater burden and challenge for the congregations and church leaders.

We are now working to ensure that our kindergartens and schools can meet the state requirements and start their work in September without any disruption to educational services caused by an eventual lack of bomb shelters. This is the only way to save our educational system and the only hope that our community remains in its homeland, in Transcarpathia.

The most important and critical asset of our social ministry is that our pastors and their families stay in Transcarpathia and coordinate the effort of the local parishes to take care of all those who suffer from the war and are left behind: the elderly, the sick, the large families, the disabled and the internally displaced persons who unfortunately cannot return to their homes. Families torn apart are struggling: husbands working abroad and afraid to return home, wives visiting them on weekends with the children. We carry emotional and physical burdens. We put our hope in the Almighty God, who has a plan for us even in this time of war.

We are grateful to all who have contributed in any way to help us in our work, but especially to enable us to continue the ministry entrusted to us. May God's rich blessings be upon all our brothers and sisters, and all our partners and donors, whether individuals, churches or organisations around the world.

God may bless our lives and help us to end to the war as soon as possible and to embrace a time of peace.

Sándor Zán Fábrián

Bishop of the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia, Ukraine