

Baptists settling in for long stay at refugee camps

WARSAW, Poland (BP and local reports) – For years after Russia’s bombs stop exploding and loved ones are eulogized, displaced Ukrainian refugees may still need counseling and intervention to deal with the losses of war. Southern Baptist churches, ministries, and entities are already on the ground in Europe training churches and ministers, leaders told Baptist Press.

Among the groups responding to the crisis is the disaster relief department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB). The department is currently scheduling credentialed volunteers to travel to refugee centers in Poland during the months of April, May, June, July, and August. For more information, contact Hubert Yates, MBCB director of disaster relief, at hyates@mbcb.org.

Healing, restoration



Perez

Beth Perez is director of global education for Lifeline Children’s Services in Birmingham Ala., which has served orphans and families in Ukraine and Romania for nearly 20 years.

“We’ve heard it may take two to three generations to find some deeper levels of healing and restoration. Doesn’t mean that there’s not hope in this generation in this moment. We want to

definitely encourage and empower those walking through this now.

“If we’re not meeting those needs now – we’re not intervening for them, helping them process this trauma – there’s going to be long-term impacts for sure,” she said.

Among Lifeline’s partners is SEND Relief, the joint compassion ministry of Southern Baptists’ International Mission Board in Richmond, Va., and North American Mission Board in Alpharetta, Ga.

Acts 8:1 moment



Burnham

Will Burnham sees the widespread displacement of millions of Ukrainians as an opportunity to grow God’s kingdom. He’s the Scottsville Road campus pastor and international catalyst for Living Hope Church in Bowling Green, Ky. He recently took an eight-member fact finding team of ministers to Poland to locate churches and others to partner with in trauma counseling, evangelism, and discipleship for Ukrainian refugees.

“It’s an Acts 8:1 moment where God is distributing His people,” Burnham told Baptist Press from Warsaw. “There are probably 100,000 Ukrainian Believers that are being distributed now throughout Europe, and just what an opportunity it is to take the Gospel throughout Europe and make disciples and plant churches. We just want to be able to meet the Lord wherever He’s at work,” he said.

“The main thing with trauma counseling is listening and letting people share what they’re comfortable sharing,” Burnham pointed out, “and then, there’s a way to bridge that with a traumatic story from Scripture like Joseph (Jacob’s son) and show how God can use what is intended for evil for good and [provide a] bridge to being able to share the true hope through the Gospel.”

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Beth Perez, Lifeline Children’s Services director of global education

“This won’t be a ‘one-person-can-save-the-day’ mentality. This will be the church being the church and working together in unity, an ‘all hands on deck’ approach,” Perez said. “Research shows this could even be a multigenerational recovery. We’re looking at long-term. We don’t want to just come in in this moment... Our heart is definitely going to be to walk alongside long-term.”

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder



Morton

Rick Morton, Lifeline’s vice president of engagement, said bringing trauma care resources to families and churches ministering to children has long been part of Lifeline’s necessary work.

“We’re taking what we’ve learned in all the years of working

in trauma and adapting some of those materials and some of that training," Morton said, "and will begin to deploy that in Romania."

The refugees, many of whom are suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), typically have lost a sense of safety and can become vulnerable in looking for ways to cope, Perez said. Refugees can face lingering challenges that expose them to such ills as exploitation, substance abuse and spousal abuse, she stressed.

"I would only imagine it would be a natural human response to turn towards anything you can to... decrease the stress, which ultimately increases the stress," Perez said. "If we're not pointing them to the true hope, the true healer, the true provider of their needs, it's natural human instinct unfortunately to seek out those resources to help us try to calm down.

"Everyone's more vulnerable and when people are more vulnerable, that's when we see some exploitation happening," she said. "I've already been reading some articles about how young girls at the borders, when they're leaving Ukraine, some not-great people are waiting for them to take advantage."

Burnham found opportunities to share the Gospel during his fact finding trip, receiving "every response you would typically get in the States. Some are excited to hear it, some are reserved, and some don't want to listen."

He implores Americans to learn to share the Gospel now, in order to be prepared when God allows them to meet refugees in need of Good News. "Learn how to share the Gospel and make disciples in the States so they're ready to do it when God sends them somewhere else," he said.

Supporting the response

Gifts by churches in support of the Ukraine crisis response

may be given through the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, utilizing the Church Mission Giving Designation Form (Pink Sheet), designating "International Disaster Relief/Ukraine Conflict Response." Submit to MBCB, P. O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530.

Individual gifts may be given through the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board website, designating "International Disaster Relief/Ukraine Conflict Response." Checks may be mailed to the above address with the same designation.

Gifts will be utilized to support the ministry needs of Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief and MBCB teams assisting in Poland, supporting the other response sites with funding for ministry needs, and assisting SEND Relief with the purchase of supplies for distribution in the affected countries.

The Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief ministry is supported by gifts to the Mississippi Cooperative Program and the Margaret Lackey State Missions Offering.