

IMB's Chitwood visits with Ukraine refugees in Poland

POLAND (BP) – Paul Chitwood, president of Southern Baptists' International Mission Board (IMB) in Richmond, Va., has been in Eastern Europe this week visiting with refugees and hearing stories of the devastation wrought by Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine.

SEND Relief, a joint compassion ministry of IMB and Southern Baptists' North American Mission Board in Alpharetta, GA., is at work providing emergency food supplies, shelter, and clothing to displaced families.

In a video recorded on the border between Ukraine and Poland, Chitwood invited Southern Baptists to be a part of the ministry there as Ukrainians stream into Poland seeking safety.

"We're here to minister to them in any way we can," Chitwood says in the video. "We're grateful for the prayers and the financial support of Southern Baptists to make possible us sharing help and hope in the name of Christ with those who are now displaced and refugees from their own homes."

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Many IMB workers in Eastern Europe have been relocated out of the war's danger zone, but ministry continues. Chitwood visited with Ukrainian Baptist pastor and church planter

Anatoliy Shmilikhovskyy, who brought his family out of Ukraine.

Shmilikhovskyy's church is part of the Generation Church Planting Network founded by IMB, Religion News Service reported. "I'm sorry for getting emotional," Shmilikhovskyy said in talking with Chitwood. "I wasn't prepared for this in seminary."

Baptists in Poland have sprung into action, with many churches housing refugees in their buildings. The Polish Baptist Union initially hoped to house 500 refugees, and has since doubled that number to 1,000. Eight centers were designated to receive refugees, but Baptists increased the number to 40 camps located across Poland.

The United Nations puts the current number of Ukrainian refugees in the hundreds of thousands, with that number predicted to rise to as many as four million. As the conflict escalates, SEND Relief and its partners are preparing for further ministry, including food relief, shelter and transportation.

"If you want to be a part of supporting this work, please go to SendRelief.org, where you can donate and also find prayer points for you and for your church," Chitwood said.