

# Miss. Baptists send van for war relief effort in Ukraine

*Editor's note: In May 2022, the Baptist Disaster Relief organizations of Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Ohio contributed funds to Ukrainian Baptist churches to purchase a van to carry relief supplies into their war-torn country. Nineteen loads of supplies have been taken into Ukraine since the van was purchased. The following is an eyewitness account from a local coordinator working with Send Relief, Southern Baptists' compassion ministry. His identity is being withheld for his safety.*

Together with the other two vans, we brought a total of 1,250 Christmas packages for children from the Kharkiv region and many other essentials such as food, warm clothes, and sleeping bags.

The trip was planned a week before Christmas, and that's when winter hit. I was supposed to go with a second driver but it turned out that just two days before the trip, his passport expired. I had already traveled to Ukraine many times, so I knew the realities and what to expect.

That said, I decided to go alone and pick up a young brother from a border church along the way. (We've known the believers here for many years before the war, as we did summer Vacation Bible School programs for children in the area).

Our destination this time was a Catholic aid center run near Kyiv. It was an extremely interesting project in which the organizations of non-believers (businesses), Catholics (Dominican Order), and Protestants (Baptists) joined together in unity for the children – victims of war and, at the same time, perfect testimonies of God's love in deed and in truth beyond divisions.

The other cars left a few days earlier because just getting to the border was already a challenge due to snowfall and ice covering the roads. We witnessed a few accidents but thankfully missed the bigger surprises.

The crossing of the border itself – thanks to God and the friendly border guards and customs officers on the Polish side – went very smoothly although the queue of cars was 15 kilometers [9.3 miles] long.



WINTER IN UKRAINE – Volunteers working with Send Relief, Southern Baptists' compassion ministry, labor under harsh winter conditions to change tires on a relief supply van headed into Ukraine. Mississippi Baptists contributed to the purchase of the van. (Uncredited photo)

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In a nutshell, the remainder of the trip into Ukraine did not go our way, but God was with us.

Because of unexpected potholes in the road, three of the four wheels were significantly damaged. This does not happen normally. I know the roads in Ukraine and have an adapted driving style, but these were unusual.

At the first and second failures, God sent us some kind people who helped us to get out of trouble efficiently. Unfortunately, we arrived at our destination very late and had to go back. We drove the remaining kilometers during the curfew, where *de facto* emergency-only vehicles could drive.

At a few checkpoints (the kind you see only in war movies), we were let go after questioning.

The road was white and icy and it was late at night, so we were thankful to arrive safely. The next day, I decided not to leave in the morning but to stay for the service and perhaps give a few words of encouragement to my brothers and sisters.

After the service I met with the elders and pastors to talk about the situation, further needs, and their activities in the more dangerous areas of Ukraine. I left late in the afternoon because many people wanted to meet, hug, and pray together.

Many of the women and children have stayed with us for several months since the be-



POWER TO THE CHURCHES – SendRelief, the compassion ministry funded by Southern Baptists, is supplying electrical generators to churches in Ukraine that otherwise would be worshipping in the dark and cold as Russian forces constantly bomb the country's critical infrastructure during the winter months of greatest need. (Uncredited photo)

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As such, they are living week-to-week, always on edge and ready for the next evacuation or defense measure.

On the way to Poland, the navigation device guided me along a side road where I came across a bus from the Netherlands in a snowdrift. I had a shovel and chains with me, so I managed to pull them out.

Farther along the route, the rear wheels took a beating and since it was night I decided to stop in the morning in a nearby garage to resolve what had happened. It turned out that one tire was ready to burst. God was watching.

From then on, the trip went peacefully and I arrived home safely without further incidents.

In the new year, we have already sent over a dozen power generators and another ten pallets of food for our brothers in Ukraine to distribute on the frontline. The generator units have helped immensely and are not only used during Sunday services but also during the week when youth meetings and

other activities are being organized.



SIGN OF THE TIMES – An abandoned child's playground in an unidentified city in Ukraine betrays pockmarked signs of the all-out war being waged by Russia against that small country. (Uncredited photo)

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We have another trip in two weeks, and more and more often there is talk of another wave of evacuations due to problems with electricity, water, and heat supplies in larger cities and surrounding areas.

Russia is bombing Ukraine's cities and infrastructure constantly, so the end of this is not yet in sight.

We try to provide aid through local believers, congregations, and churches so that spiritual help reaches people along with practical help and to ensure that love and grace are expressed practically along with the Gospel at every step, because we know the true hope for peace is only in Jesus and the peace of God surpasses circumstances. No force can overcome it.

I thank God for you always – for your support, friendship, and above all your prayers!