



HELPING UKRAINE

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

26th March 2022

Dear sisters and brothers, dear friends.

I would like to thank you all very much for your generosity, dedication and great commitment to help. In the churches, in your homes, together with other organizations, volunteers, in cooperation with the communities, etc. You help mostly everyone in need, without distinction. I very much appreciate the work of the teams led by Diakonia. Your help is professional and at the same time very personal and kind.

The situation is changing fast, we make some mistakes, but you know: he who does nothing, does nothing wrong.

But I ask you all again: save your strength, the road we are on will be long. I believe that we will learn many new things and support each other. We are neither the first nor the last to go through something like this. When there is more time, I will tell you about the experience of our brothers and sisters in Vienna UMC. At the end of 2015, the first refugees from Syria began to arrive in Austria, in Vienna. From their experience we can, I believe, learn a lot. I am writing from a meeting of superintendents and executives in Mulhouse, a small town on the border of France and Switzerland.

Wishing you God's grace, strength, hope and peace

Ivana Procházková, UMC Superintendent

Thank you all very much for your support of our efforts to help those fleeing the war in Ukraine.

Your funds help those in need here in the Czech Republic and in Ukraine.

Thank you for making this possible with your support! On the following pages, please find a summary of current information *from parishes and congregations, from Christian Aid Centers, from the facilities we operate for refugees*

and *the status of the collection* - CZK transparent account and USD account.

■ What is happening in parishes and congregations

ECM parishes and congregations helping Ukraine — week 21 - 27 March 2022

Tachov

The collection of humanitarian aid that the congregation was able to muster largely shifted on Tuesday to the local Red Cross, where there is a central dispensary. Some of the collection was used by Ukrainian families right here. We also give toys that we may miss from the daycare center or that people have brought as donations. All honor to Eva for her Russian and warm attitude. We have a local coordination meeting of various organizations coming up.

Jana Daněčková

Litoměřice



We continue to deepen our collaboration with the city and local non-profit organizations and volunteers. We are helping to map and meet the needs of incoming women with children from Ukraine who are in two hostels. In cooperation with Diakonia of the Church of Czech Brethren and the TV station Nova, a successful fundraiser focused on the needs of children from Ukraine – Boxes from the Heart. One of our church members volunteered. We are expecting some women with children to attend the Sunday service, and we are also inviting the children to the softball club.

In **Jablonné v Podještědí** on Friday, Zdeněk Brož hosted the first five people from southeastern Ukraine.

A second part of the accommodation is also prepared for the next needy.

Filip Jandovský

Praha 9 – Horní Počernice

The church organizes Czech language courses for refugees from Ukraine.

Dominika Kružíková teaches six days a week.



Slaný

At the request of the Hungarian superintendent, Slaný UMC immediately accommodated two families who were moving from Kiev to Sweden. The families from the congregation sheltered four adults and six children.

Třeboň



We have decided to adapt and offer the space that served as a base for our congregation as a temporary home for a family from Ukraine. Not only people from the congregation were involved in the adaptations, but also other people who wanted to help. The very next Saturday, Mrs. Inna and her three children moved into the parsonage. We are happy for them and pray for them: For good relationship and wisdom in deciding how to move forward.

Mária Kunstová

Praha 10 – Strašnice



Our meeting room now serves as a bedroom for a Ukrainian family. We signed up as emergency housing for a few days, and I often get calls from the main train station in Prague saying they would like to put someone in with us. We already have a second family. The current one has stayed for almost two weeks and cannot find work or accommodation yet. We also continue to collect non-perishable food on Wednesdays when the church is open to the public. It is nice to see people's willingness to help.

Milan Mrázek

Mikulov

On Thursday, 24 March, we accommodated six people from Ukraine in the attic of the Valtice church house, where we provide accommodation during the summer. We are working intensively to install heating. For now, they have to endure in makeshift conditions.

Several family members, who have Ukrainian roots, came to stay with our families - four youth, three grandmothers and other women and young children. We have announced a long-term collection in the church and we want to support them.

Two families from our parish have offered accommodation in a separate family home. One house is already occupied by "our" Ukrainians, the other - a farm - is offered to people interested.

In Mikulov, we are negotiating with the crisis staff of the town about the use of the prayer room for adaptation groups (Monday to Friday mornings). On Saturday and Sunday we are opening a children's club, which will be led by two young sisters in Christ who arrived from Ukraine in the last few days. The first one will be on Sunday, March 27.

Ctirad Hrubý

Russian Speaking UMC Praha – Agape and Praha 2 UMC



Humanitarian
consignment
to Ukraine





Pastor Lev Shults (third photo, on the right) helps at the refugee center at the Prague Congress Center, pictured with Mayor Zdeněk Hřib (center), who personally thanked him for the cooperation with the church.

■ What is happening in Christian Aid Centers

The Christian Aid Center helping Ukraine — week 21 - 27 March 2022

Christian Aid Center Plzeň (Pilsen)

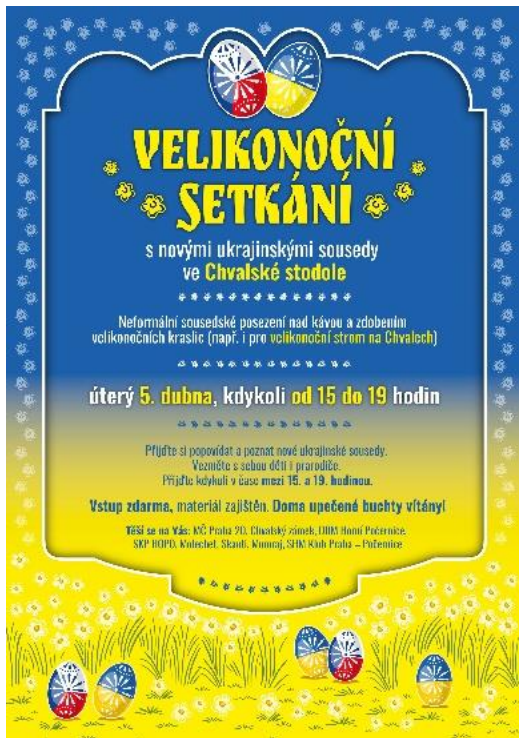
We took in a young boy from Ukraine to the Halfway House. Based on this positive experience, we have increased the capacity of the Halfway House by two more beds for young adults from Ukraine.

My colleagues and I are considering signing up as psychotherapists for the therapeutic support service for people from Ukraine. But for now we are dealing with the language barrier.

Marek Novotný, director

Christian Aid Center Praha – Horní Počernice





We involved Ukrainian children in existing activities in the shelter. My daughter Maya also helped in the origami workshop. Dominika Kružiková from Horní Počernice UMC offered to teach Czech. Classes take place every day except Sunday. We managed to find jobs for two mothers, and another one found a job on her own in the warehouse of MALL.CZ.

On Saturday, Ukrainian mothers with their children are going to a local theatre which offers a fairy tale with Ukrainian dubbing.

In April, together with other associations and organizations in Horní Počernice, we are planning an informal neighborhood get-together for Ukrainian families located in Horní Počernice, including music and egg dyeing - see the flyer for the upcoming event.

Gabriela Selinger, fundraiser

■ What is happening in our refugee facilities

The Diakonia of the Czech UMC arranges and organizes accommodation for refugees in three facilities: two church facilities - the Veselka recreation house near Vimperk and the Poušť recreation area near Bechyně, and one borrowed - the Dekonta recreational house in Vojnův Městec (staffed by the Christian Aid Center Ječmínek, Žďár nad Sázavou). Coordination is provided by the director Karel Nyerges (diakonie@umc.cz).

The final intended total capacity of all three buildings is approximately 60 beds. All of these facilities require staffing and cooperation with the local government; a doctor, interpreter, and crisis intervention are always available. The preparation of the facilities is only possible through the dedicated work of local church members and professionals who are willing to give up their free time for this cause. The cooperation with the food bank in České Budějovice is also a great help.

The situation and availability changes every day in all places.

Some of the needy stay longer, others continue on.

A total of 42 people - half of them are children - have benefited from this assistance so far. The youngest is eight months old.

Diakonia UMC

Today is exactly one month since the war in Ukraine began. A month when many lives were changed not only in Ukraine, but also here. Our lives in safety had to be set in the mode of help and urgent care. We care for the needy, it is our natural reaction, we respond to pain, we can perceive needs, and this leads us to some response of help. We have been trying to help the people of Ukraine for a month now. We are now in a situation that is new and unfamiliar to most of us, and can cause anxiety and fear. We find ourselves in a situation that reveals our weaknesses, but also our strengths. Right now, when we are all revealing our nature, unconditional acceptance and mutual tolerance are expected of us. Let us try to ensure that these virtues remain among us, even though the environment will already be promoting different thoughts and opinions.

Now to the action itself. The day after the war began, we discussed how best to help those in need. One of the options for assistance was to expand the capacity of existing services of Christian Aid Centers, but this was not legally possible for all of them. A decision regarding assistance to the people of Ukraine had to be made as soon as possible. That is why we are using what is already available. This means the premises of the recreation centers Poušť and Veselka, and later there was also the possibility of using another facility - Dekonta company offered its recreational facility in Vojnův Městec, with the pledge that it would significantly contribute to the running costs.

What did all this decision mean? First of all, a lot of work, dedication and commitment. I will try to give you a list of the activities that had to be carried out as quickly as possible.

Not all the activities are listed here, but I have tried to include the most important ones:

- setting up a team of people involved in the start of the service;
- networking of medical and health needs (networking of services - GP, pediatrician, pharmacy at the place of accommodation);
- communication with the municipality and approval of our project by the municipality, establishing a relationship and cooperation with the local infrastructure;
- relationship with the local food bank in České Budějovice - there is constant communication, but despite all efforts they cannot always respond to the needs of people from Ukraine;
- retrofitting of the facilities - the facilities are mainly equipped for summer operation, for this reason we had to retrofit it for operation in the heating season and adapt the premises for young children and infants;
- transporting more people from their accommodation to the Regional Centre in České Budějovice - the cooperation is carried out free of charge with the town of Bechyně and the non-profit organization CHEIRON from Tábor (it should be remembered that we have limited means of transport for such a large volume of people);
- ensuring registration of people from Ukraine at the Labor Office;
- ensuring communication between the Czech Republic and Ukraine in order to maintain contact with relatives in Ukraine;

- social and legal counselling;
- ensuring social and emotional stability.

This is just a basic list of our activities. There are, of course, many more issues that need to be continuously addressed.

How does it all work?

Originally I wanted to use the aid platform offered by the Czech Republic, but they did not respond for a long time, and we were ready to receive the first people from Ukraine. That is why I decided to use the way of receiving families from Ukraine "on my own". I found a group of Ukrainian businessmen from Plzeň who have a great overview and range of contacts (over 18,000) for people from Ukraine and are able to respond quickly to the actual needs of the affected families. They can arrange for people to be transported from the bombed site to Plzeň and then transport these families to our sites. They are financing the transportation themselves and are grateful for our support and help. They also cooperate with the Municipality of Plzeň.

And what is the current situation?

Currently 35 people are accommodated in Poušť' and Veselka buildings, some are still on their way. Originally we declared that we had about 100 vacancies in the 3 buildings mentioned above. We based this on the capacity we offer during our summer stays. However, practice has shown that we have to reduce this volume, especially in view of the fact that the facility receives different numbers of families and therefore it is not possible to fill all the beds. For example, a cottage with a capacity of 4 beds cannot be occupied by a family of three and accommodate someone else (a stranger). I can only imagine using the full capacity if we knew how long this situation would last. I want us to create a place similar to their home for these people, I see that as a priority in the current situation.

A big thank you, among many others, goes to Zdeněk Neužil, who takes care of the Veselka operation, Bohouš Opočenský, who takes care of the Poušť' operation, and Jan Procházka, who takes over the Poušť' operation as needed.

In the week of 28 March 2022 we would like to open the premises in Vojnův Městec. We had to postpone the opening date because of the implementation team, who unfortunately fell ill with Covid-19. My desire is to occupy this place with children from the orphanage that was destroyed by the Russian army. The premises are suitable for this purpose.

What will be next?

The aim of our efforts is that people who have found a home with us will gradually become independent. This means finding jobs, integrating their children into our education system and then finding independent housing. This is already happening slowly but surely. At Veselka, one man already has a job and in Bechyně, the mayor has promised to employ women from Poušť' in the Technical Services of the town.

What can happen?

Of course, it is impossible to predict, but if the vision of integrating these people into the labor market succeeds and finding subsequent housing of their own, we shall be back to square one, and be able to take on more new people in need. However, it will not be the same situation, because we will already have some experience. But we will still need funding to get them started. Because the vast majority of people who come to us have almost nothing.

Thank you for your prayer, moral and financial support.

Without you we could not help, and that is why you help with us!

24th March 2022

Karel Nyerges, director of Diakonia UMC



Veselka – safety after two thousand kilometers

■ Current collection status

The transparent bank account

In order to provide the above-mentioned aid, we are collecting funds on the transparent account "We help Ukraine" - 2602129572/2010.

Status as of 26 March 2022: As of the opening date of 24 February 2022 for the account total of CZK **422 256** has been received, CZK **315 000** has been spent so far (helping refugees in Czechia and material aid directly to Ukraine in cooperation with the Russian Speaking UMC Praha – Agape), the current balance is CZK **107 256**.

Many thanks to all donors!

New: As of Tuesday 22 March, a payment gateway linked to this account has been launched on our website www.umc.cz for convenient payments in Czech crowns and dollars or euros (English version). A preview of the account can be found [here](#).

Donations from abroad

We thank our international donors!

Through the Bishop's Office of our Central Conference, our USD account has received **\$17,415** and more funds are on the way.

Contacts with our church partners and friends abroad are handled by the Mission Coordinator Rev. Jana Křížová, for which we thank her very much!

How we handle funds in the transparent account and donations from abroad:

- Priorities for the use of resources respond to a changing and evolving situation. Given the difficulty of forecasting, the strategy is refined at regular intervals with particular regard to the effectiveness and sustainability of our aid - also in view of the commitment we have made to the specific people in our facilities and the trust they have placed in us.
- The main priority for us now is to secure and maintain the assistance to those who have already entrusted themselves to our Diakonia, parishes and centers, and to extend and continue this assistance. We do not forget about the direct humanitarian aid going to Ukraine, where we consider it important to effectively use the synergies with our Russian-speaking UMC and our direct contacts in Ukraine as well as our knowledge of the local terrain.
- On the basis of the actual operations to date, we are in the process of quantifying the costs of operating the refugee facilities established by Diakonia. For the time being, we expect to operate these facilities for at least the next six months. Even if the war ends immediately, the reconstruction of Ukraine and the need for refugees to stay abroad will take longer.
- With this in mind, we are also transferring a portion of the funds directly to Diakonia UMC - to an operationally earmarked account dedicated to the operation of our refugee facilities, and to enable longer-term planning and organization of this assistance.
- Diakonia UMC also tries to take advantage of all current opportunities for financial support to refugees from the state. Despite the government's media image, not everything is working as declared so far. Diakonia also tries to link our facilities with the respective municipalities and obtain their material and non-material support.
- Our churches and Christian Aid Centers respond selflessly and promptly to the need for help in their places of operation. These are also churches that find it difficult to manage a balanced budget on their own. It will therefore also be necessary to support them in their assistance to those fleeing the war in the medium and long term.
- The specific financial flows and the use of funds are currently approved by the Diakonia UMC Director together with the superintendent and the Head of the District Office. Blanka Šimková (blanka.simkova@umc.cz) is the contact person for collecting any requests from congregations and Christian Aid Centers for financial support within the framework of the transparent collection.

- All funds raised are earmarked for aid to Ukraine. Should an unexpected favorable situation arise and there is no further need to fund aid here in the Czech Republic or humanitarian shipments, any remaining funds would go directly to the rebuilding of Ukraine in cooperation with the Ukrainian Methodist Church.
- **Thank you for your trust in us to help those in need. In this situation, which is new for us, we are trying to help as efficiently and thoughtfully as possible with a good and quick result. We also thank you for your forbearance in gradually refining and fine-tuning the processes we have set up and seeking the most effective form of assistance.**
Your trust is greatly appreciated.

For donations from abroad for our aid to Ukrainian refugees there are four ways:

- You may send your gifts through the Advance of Global Ministries, CZECH REPUBLIC IN MISSION TOGETHER (#00399A).
Go to <https://umcmmission.org/advance-project/00399a/> and click on the red DONATE NOW button.
In the box that reads "Designate Your Gift" enter that it is for Ukraine Refugees. The funds are sent through the bishop's office, and we receive the full amount because banking fees are covered by other sources. (Preferable.)
- You may use the payment gateway at our web site <http://umc.cz/>. Please select EN in the upper right corner for English, this will allow you to pay in US\$. The funds will be converted into CZK and go directly to the transparent account. (We would receive the funds quickly, but pay fees 2% of the amount to the bank.)
- You may still transfer your gifts to Czech crowns transparent account
IBAN: CZ10 2010 0000 0026 0212 9572 BIC/SWIFT: FIOBCZPPXXX
- You may still transfer your gifts to US\$ bank account dedicated to aid to Ukraine
IBAN: CZ04 2700 0000 0013 8741 5749 BIC/SWIFT: BACXCZPP

Please do not send checks to Czechia, it is extremely costly and slow to cash them here.

Thank you to everyone who is involved in helping those in need financially, by prayers, as well as with practical help and their time and energy.

Edited by Martin Kukla