

Dear Friends and Partners in Ministry,

March 2022

Sometimes a newsletter just can't fit into one page. This is one of those times. For everyone, these last two years have been a time of loss, unpredictability, and the ground shifting underneath our feet. All this has become exponential for me with the war between Ukraine and Russia.

The war broke out as I was conducting a training in Dallas for camp directors from across the country who are focusing on expanding their camps to urban fatherless youth. I was receiving texts, emails, and live video coverage from my friends and colleagues on both sides of the border. Somehow, I was able to finish the training.

Ukraine & Russia

I am still in shock wishing I could wake up from this nightmare, but every morning reminds me it is really happening. I have many colleagues in Ukraine in various cities that I have helped either develop their orphan program or worked with in trauma training. None wanted to leave the country, choosing instead to stay, with their families, and serve their fellow countryman in this time of despair. They have turned their homes, churches, and residential orphan apartments into shelters for the hundreds of people fleeing the East or whose homes in the cities have been bombed. They are feeding them, praying for them, and then driving them through the war zone to try to reach the Western border and safety. Then they return to their original city and do it all over again with another group.

They send me videos of a missile attack destroying a residential building across the park, the dystopian images of Kiev and streets I walked many times, and the prayer meetings at their church which I imagine to be similar to the type of desperate prayers happening in the upper room after the crucifixion.

Their prayer requests are that the Lord spare their lives so that discipleship can continue and grow as people are so desperate, that the Lord's name would be glorified in this, courage to be faithful whatever may happen, money to buy food and gas to serve all the people, and peace.

The Russians are living their own nightmare. It is difficult to explain the connection between these two countries, but it is hard to find a Russian family without some Ukrainians intermarried or otherwise related. For them this is not a war with enemies but with family! There is so much confusion there regarding why they are even going to war. My dozens of friends and colleagues are disillusioned and angry at the senselessness of this and their powerlessness. Many more protestors are showing up on the streets of cities than ever before, only to be hauled off to jail. Recently a law came out criminalizing any negative talk against the "special military operation." Even using the term "war" could get you 15 years in prison. They are racked with shame and guilt.



People in Kiev receiving aid from my friends

Russians I work with understand the international response against their country but feel abandoned and utterly alone. They understand quite well that their future has just become very bleak; poverty and oppression from within, isolation from without. They believe the whole world hates them. One colleague wrote me:

“Don't leave us, please, no matter what! We want to continue to communicate and work together. Yesterday, one of the mothers (who alone brings up three children, two of them are disabled) told me, ‘Irina, we will not be able to do without your support, without your help and support we simply will not survive with the children now.’ And she is not talking about the material means, but about our relationship. We need to think about this and how we can be in community to support each other. Not the enmity that politicians broadcast from different sides!”

The losses on both sides are immense!

What am I doing in this time?

My days are filled with doing what I can to help manage crises on both sides of the border from here:

- Getting money into Ukraine for food, gas, buying vans to evacuate people.
- Organizing prayer times.
- Sending materials to people working with the displaced people in country and refugees in other countries on practical things they can do to help people deal with their trauma in this situation.
- Getting daily updates from colleagues in Ukraine and being a support to them.
- Finding ways to get money into Russia for my now cut-off staff and colleagues to sustain them and their ministries.
- Figuring out ways to still support them with ever increasing censorship closing down avenues.
- Trying to help with logistics for some U.S. staff forced to leave Russia.



Many of you have helped with my pleas for these items. I cannot thank you enough!

How am I doing?

The weight of the burden of walking daily with these precious friends on both sides of the border has been extremely difficult for me. Many other wars have or currently are going on around the globe, but this one is personal for me. I am receiving live videos from my friends in real time. The streets of Kiev or St. Petersburg on the news are streets my kids grew up on, streets I've walked so many times! I can't comprehend what I am seeing. I realize I am experiencing a secondary trauma, and I have many people praying for and supporting me.



This time has caused me to lean into the Lord and His promises as never before. Several passages that have been very important to me are:

- 2 Tim. 1:12 - Paul tells Timothy he was able to endure all his suffering because he knew the One he was believing in. He didn't just have a head knowledge about Him, but actually knew Him personally and, therefore, trusted Him with whatever was happening.
- 1 Pt. 1:3-5 - Peter tells the suffering believers to remember their LIVING HOPE and their very real untouchable inheritance waiting for them in heaven. He is trying to help them shift their focus from the brevity of this life to the truth of eternal life to help them in their suffering.
- Matt. 26 - The garden of Gethsemane. Jesus submits to the will of the Father and says His suffering is a part of a bigger plan told in Scripture long ago.
- Heb. 12:2 - Tells me Jesus, also, endured because He knew the Father and the joy ahead of Him. Therefore, He could trust Him even in death.

So, I am trying to focus my mind and soul these days on knowing Jesus better, so that I may have the same confidence. I am meditating on all His promises, His character, and His faithfulness in my life over all these years.

I am here, now. I am part of His bigger story that Has been fixed from long ago. He is good and trustworthy. He loves me and all those I hold dear. He has prepared for me a future that is sure, secure, and wonderful. The battle is focusing on these truths *in the midst of my doubt and fears*.

What are my plans going forward?

Lord willing, I will continue to:

- Do what I can from here to support colleagues and friends on both sides throughout this crisis.
- Work with the Christian camping ministries to develop their plans for effectively reaching the fatherless youth.
- Journey with foster care families to help them learn more effective ways to deal with the trauma in their foster children and support their needs as they take on this immense task.
- Work in South Minneapolis helping to develop programs for the marginalized youth.
- Follow the Lord's leading as I see what comes after this crisis in Russia and Ukraine.

Thank you for letting me vent and sharing in bearing my burdens. Thank you for standing with me in faithful partnership. It is this that allows me to hold up my brothers and sisters on both sides of this conflict and help them bear their burdens. Truly we need one another!

May His Kingdom come, May His will be done, on earth as it is in heaven!



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