

I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the Lord who does all these things.

Isaiah 45:7

ITMI
Monthly

1 JUNE 2022

intouchmission.org

A Trip to Ukraine with ITMI's Adi Ban

"Load Yourself with Patience..."

Oradea to Suceava

"Don't take pictures of soldiers or border personnel. You can talk normally, but be observant with what's going on," ITMI's [Adrian \(Adi\) Ban](#) was instructing the group of Americans.

Adi was in the driver's seat of the minivan, deftly navigating the road from his home in Oradea, Romania, through the Carpathian mountains, to Suceava (Sue-cha-va), Romania. ITMI's **Steve Evers** sat next to him in the passenger's seat, and their traveling companions, ITMI Board member Jon Dekkers and his high-school-age grandson, Van Dekkers, were riding in the backseat. Behind them, a second van was driven by Dan, a fellow believer and friend of Adi's from Oradea, Romania. Jonny Dekkers, Van's father, was riding with Dan.

Suceava is 45 minutes away from Romania's northern border with Ukraine. It is also the location of the warehouse where Adi and his network of believers are storing donated goods and preparing them to be sent into Ukraine.



Destruction in Kyiv.



ITMI's Adi Ban unloads food parcels in Kyiv.



Steve and his team's route from the Ban's city, Oradea, to Ukraine.

(continued on p.2)



Back row L to R: Van, Dan, Adi, Jon, Jonny. Front row: Steve with a Ukrainian pastor in Chernivsti, Ukraine, blurred for his protection.



Steve and Mircea at the warehouse in Suceava.



Praying in Kyiv with the guys who received the food parcels Steve's team transported from Chernivtsi. (Their faces are blurred for their protection.)

(continued from p.1)

The two-vehicle caravan was on the road to Suceava when Steve had asked Adi, "What should and shouldn't we do when we get to the border?"

Adi continued, "There are three types of security at the border: people checking documents, people checking vehicles, and people that check your person. Don't joke about war and bombs and things like this. But at the same time, be yourself and load yourself with lots of patience. Dan was there for 3 hours [on a previous trip] and nothing moved. They wondered if they would sleep there. There's nothing you can do, actually, except pray. So this is what I would advise when it comes to crossing the border. When we get there, we'll follow the Ukrainians' lead - whatever they tell us to do. If they are willing to do it, we will do it. If not, we won't."

This was a policy Adi had adopted for his deliveries in Ukraine. If the Ukrainians felt it was safe, and would risk going themselves, then he would go. "After all," he reasoned, "we serve the same God," and they have more context and information.

(Which, as a side note, is a good example of why ITMI finds working with nationals to be so effective.)

Mircea the Faithful Warehouse Worker Suceava, Romania

The next day, the team left their hotel and headed to the staging warehouse. A local believer and businessman, Dragos, has donated space in the warehouse used by his business toward the relief effort transporting supplies into Ukraine. He's also donated the time of his accounts manager, who organizes the bureaucratic paperwork needed to get the vans and supplies into Ukraine. Dragos' business manufactures custom concrete items used in city water and drainage.

Upon their arrival, the cargo from Oradea had to be unloaded and the vans reloaded with what needed to go to Chernivtsi, their first stop in Ukraine. While Adi dealt with a hiccup in the logistics, Steve encountered someone who made an impact on him.

Mircea is an older gentleman from Greece. A grey beanie perched above his knotted forehead and the heavy-duty jacket he wore was made for working outside in the cold of northern Romania. There was a notable gentleness in his smile and eyes, positioned under his bushy, grey eyebrows.

Mircea was saved as a result of having seen “Jn 3:16” scratched on a surface somewhere. Now, he scratches Jn. 3:16 on every manhole or piece of custom concrete his employer ships out, attaching tracts or the Gospel of John whenever he can.

When he heard about this, Dan spoke up, “In 2014, when the Russians came to Donbas (east Ukraine) one of the first things they did was disallow the church to use the Gospel of John. They consider it ‘Nazi’ and an instigator of turmoil. It’s against their politics, so they outlawed it. If a pastor was caught using it, he could be arrested and deported to Russia. I know this from a pastor in the area.”

Steve was struck by Mircea’s commitment to sharing the Gospel in his everyday activities, faithfully planting seeds of truth where God has planted him.

Philadelphia Church Chernivtsi, Ukraine

After clearing the Romania/Ukraine border, the team drove for around 45 minutes to arrive at the campus of Philadelphia Church in Chernivtsi.

It was a large blue and grey building with 3 large gabled sections - almost like 3 buildings pushed together - that served as

both a place for church gatherings and a school, now turned into a refugee center.

The two vans had to be unloaded and then re-loaded with food parcels that the team would take to Ternopil or Kyiv. One of the pastors, Pastor Jan, gave Steve and the team a tour of the Philadelphia Church building.

Later that evening, Jonny recorded this about the tour of Philadelphia’s center in Chernivtsi, “They [the believers and pastors] were doing an amazing job coordinating not only the redistribution of food coming in from Romania but also housing dozens of families on their campus as well as providing three meals and a worship service every day!”

Jonny’s father, Jon Dekkers, wrote, “The commitment of people, especially towards fellow believers in Ukraine is different from anything I have ever experienced.”

After praying with some of the refugees who were waiting to eat dinner, the group left for the 3.5-hour drive to Ternopil. The six travelers were joined by Pastor J, who served as a guide.

The Lord Prepared a Warehouse Ternopil, Ukraine

It was late at night when the two vans arrived at a small church in Ternopil. A group of men greeted them and unloaded the washing machines, water purification systems and some food supplies from the vans. Inside the center, the hallways were lined with stacks of supplies for refugees. There were mattresses covering most of the tile floor of the large rooms where refugees sleep. The large beige tile and off-white walls were very clean - especially for being home to so many people.

The next morning after breakfast, the team headed for a warehouse owned by a local businessman and believer, now turned volunteer

relief coordinator, Ivan.

Ivan is a tall Ukrainian with an oval face and very short hair. His kind blue eyes were positioned under prominent eyebrows. He was expressive, motioning with his hands often as his deep, confident voice revealed he was well-connected and well-informed about the war in his country.

Just months before Russia invaded Ukraine, Ivan had been baffled when his business had been ousted from their previous warehouse. It was out of the blue and inexplicable. The only warehouse Ivan could find was twice the size his business needed, and a little out of his price range, but he needed a warehouse and had to take it. Later, he understood that the Lord had gone ahead of him to set up this warehouse to be used as a distribution center for food and supplies.

Ivan saw the invasion coming before most, and he didn’t wait for someone else to do something about it. At the prompting of the Spirit, he was preparing before his government was. He set up a database and information call center that is now being used by relief agencies, churches, and governments to better track where resources have gone and are needed. Because he listened to the Holy Spirit and took action, he has shown himself valuable to local politicians and even Orthodox leaders are following his lead, and he’s had many opportunities to bring glory to God as a result.

During some time in the car, Adi told Steve and the others, “What I love about working with the group in Ternopil is they are always very clear, we love Jesus and this is why we do what we do. We are called to help our brothers and sisters in Christ and whoever else is in need. So they will tell the mayor of the city, ‘we are ready to help the needy as the church of Jesus Christ.’”

He went on to say that Ivan had arranged a meeting with the person in charge of all of the aid for the county where Ternopil is located, and that individual had brought 2 hospital directors with him. Ivan brought Adi and Stephen, a Ukrainian pastor. At the end of the meeting, Adi said, "Do you mind if we pray?"

"Oh yes, please do," they replied.

Pastor Stephen did the honors of leading that prayer, and Adi said it was a joy to see the name of Jesus Christ be brought into the discussion and that the officials didn't mind it.

Steve was struck by the story. In ex-communist countries, you can never be sure if those in political positions might be opposed to Jesus and see Him as a threat to their positions and policies. Bringing Jesus into the conversation took incredible faith, and Adi did it in a foreign country where he didn't have any prior knowledge about these particular officials to know if they might be receptive to the name of Jesus or not.

"God is opening doors," Adi summarized, "What we realize again is that oftentimes if you want to walk on water, you have to step out of the boat. That's where God's moving."

The Smell of Death Kyiv, Ukraine

There were few people on the streets in the suburb of Kyiv. The sky was as grey as the mood in the city. Through the window next to the passenger seat where Steve sat, he could see the city's buildings, tattered and torn by war.

Many of the buildings were marred with large black crumbling holes - almost like black eyes - where rockets had punctured their walls. Windows were shattered everywhere. One set of beige and maroon apartment buildings, in

particular, caught Steve's attention.

A rocket had hit the outer wall on the second floor from the top, leaving a gaping hole and blackened burn marks. A twin hole could be seen in the building behind it on the same floor, where the same rocket had punched through the first building and then the second.

Military checkpoints were everywhere.

"The closer we got to Kyiv the more destruction we saw," Jonny later recorded his observations from the second van, "...as we drove through the city almost every building was damaged, many completely destroyed."

Pastor Ilya had joined the caravan, riding in Dan's van from Ternopil to Kyiv. Ilya is from the now-Russian occupied Donbas area in eastern Ukraine. In early January 2022, ITMI supporters helped with some funding to hold an outreach camp for youth just weeks before Russia invaded.

In one interaction, Ilya told Steve that after the camp, there was some leftover food boxes. He was deeply grateful to have been able to share that with some people who were holed-up in the basement of a building next door to his church. Ilya showed Steve a picture of what that basement is like now. Conditions are so crowded that children are sleeping on industrial



Two Ukrainian boys in the Ternopil church-turned-refugee-shelter.



Against the backdrop of the Ukrainian flag, two elderly ladies wait at a bus stop in Kyiv.

shelves.

Adi arranged for the caravan to transfer the food parcels packed in blue bags for the needy in Kyiv at a gas station. The gas station had been bombed and was no longer in service. Everyone pitched in to unload the food parcels that had been unloaded, sorted, and re-packed into blue bags in Ternopil for the believers in Kyiv to use to serve those in need in Jesus' name. The parcels were reloaded in vehicles going back to the Kyiv base of operations.

After praying for the brave men ministering in Kyiv who had met them at the gas station to pick up the goods, Steve's team bid them farewell.

(continued on p.6)

From the Director



DEAR TEAM: The Situation in Eastern Europe

I underestimated the range of emotions that would confront me on my recent trip to Poland, Romania, and Ukraine. Having been in refugee camps in both South Sudan and Ukraine, and ministering in the slums of India, left me unprepared somehow for what the Ukrainian war was going to expose me to.

As much as human and physical needs are vitally important, my deep passion is to see and be a part of helping people move toward and deal with their eternal needs. Humanitarian help must, as soon as possible, be part of a process that connects it to an eternal Kingdom purpose.

This trip to visit and observe our faithful ITMI partners in Poland and Romania showed me that the Ukrainian refugees, and those caring for them are still in “crisis mode”. The war and its fallout is very fresh and raw in the lives of those experiencing the repercussions. It is raw for both those serving refugees in ways far above what could be expected, and for the refugees themselves, the now homeless, completely dependent, family-broken, emotional, and isolated in a country whose language and culture is not their own.

The weight of their circumstances - the consequences of one man deciding he wanted more real estate and didn't care how many lives he destroyed to get what he wanted - are seen in the eyes and the expressions of each refugee, who in Poland, are almost all women and children. They bear the evidence of what a mind reeling from too much to process does to someone's emotions and health. The caregivers helping them are not immune to these consequences. They too have faces that now reflect the weight of helping those that God has placed before them. Pastors and church leaders seeking to comfort and assist the “single” women, mothers, wives and grandmothers now in a strange country with only what they could carry.

We in the States have our television news, our social media, our YouTube, and the internet to see and hear what is going on in Eastern Europe. We even hear bits and pieces of the damage to individuals as a result of this conflict. None of our electronic media can come close to actually being there - experiencing it firsthand. Even visiting it and being immersed for a month is not the same as living it day after day after day.

If you had been with me on this trip you would have been so incredibly proud of the ITMI partners. They have, with all their other vital, Kingdom building, life-changing ministry responsibilities, just willingly and wholeheartedly embraced the immediate needs, the tattered emotions, the opportunities to be the comforting hand of Jesus to the many, many that are flooding in from their homes and places of insecurity and danger to places and states unknown.

Each of our partners are addressing the consequences and needs of the war in different ways. The two overall categories of serving Ukrainians are (1) helping the refugees that have left Ukraine and need almost everything just to do life, and (2) helping those that remain in Ukraine, either because they cannot leave or want to stay in effort to save their home and community. **Piotr Zaremba, Andrew Gorski, Jim Larose, Leszek Wakula, Janusz Fredyk,** and **Bread of Life** are primarily living and breathing the intense daily tasks of care for the refugees that have run to Poland. **Adi and Ema Ban** are deep into acquiring and transporting supplies to the Ukrainian pastors who have stayed behind to meet the critical needs of the church and the option-less left behind in Ukraine.

We are too far away from the war and the consequences to really fully grasp and understand how great the need is and even more important, how great the opportunity is to show Jesus to a nation of hurting and attentive souls. We as the church in America, Europe, Asia, and even Africa, cannot miss this opportunity to come alongside godly servants of God who are on the frontlines of this brokenness, willingly pouring themselves out to be the hands and feet of Jesus to the traumatized and broken.

If you are moved to help these precious servants, I can assure you that your sacrificial gifts will go directly to those people and places that are most needy. We will be partnering to empower those that have proven their love for the Lord and their love for those that He loves dearly. We can't miss this opportunity- this opportunity that God has provided to share His love, His truth, and His hope.

God bless all of you who have helped us help in Eastern Europe to this point. Will you ask the Lord if He is leading you to trust Him to step out and again care for our brothers and sisters who are on the frontline? Thank you and blessings.

In His Service,

As he stepped out of the van, Steve was staggered by the mountains of vehicles stacked up, likely by the military. They were outside of Kyiv, en route to Zhytomyr, where the caravan would spend the night. As he neared one of the enormous piles of cars, he physically recoiled as the smell of rotting flesh assaulted his nostrils. The sorrowful stench of death shrouded the mountain of vehicles.

Vehicle after vehicle was peppered with shrapnel or smashed by a tank. Some of the vehicles had signs taped to their windows indicating that children had been on board, yet they were still targeted. From the back, one red car seemed almost undamaged, but what Steve saw from the front was chilling.

There were two bullet holes - one in the windshield directly in front of the driver and the other in the windshield directly in front of the passenger.

The scene was impactful to the rest of the group, too. "A sobering scene

and just a glimpse of what these people endured," Jonny wrote of the experience.

Standing within feet of the evidence of recent, sudden deaths, Steve's thoughts were filled with the finality of death and the sorrow of knowing some of the people whose final moments on earth were represented by these vehicles probably went to meet the Lord without their sins being covered by the blood of Jesus.

"I think God's giving the international church a unique evangelism and discipleship opportunity."

"Don't put off coming to Jesus!" his spirit cried out - a message he later shared on social media.

"Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."
2 Cor: 6:2b

This is the message that needs to go

out, around the world to be sure, but in Eastern Europe, now more than ever. It's the message our supporters have been able to help send out to refugees and those sheltering in place, through the support of the work of our partners in Poland among the refugees and the Ban's work with their Ukrainian network of believers.

Reflecting on what he saw in Eastern Europe, Steve summarized, "I think God's giving the international church a unique evangelism and discipleship opportunity. This is a great opportunity to do more than provide for physical needs, but to partner with people actually ministering on the ground."

We're thankful there are godly believers, working on the ground, sacrificing radically, to bring the Gospel to bear on each and every difficult situation, to offer its healing power and the possibility for a life of freedom in Christ to anyone who might listen. If you haven't joined them in partnership for this cause yet, today is a great time to start.

-Summer Kelley, Steve Evers

FOR PRAISE

1. Romania/Ukraine - Faithful believers serving the needy and boldly declaring Jesus' name.
2. Poland - Gorski - Opportunity to rest, visit ministry partners and encourage others in the US this month.
3. Zambia - Leach - Safe crossing and return from a fruitful time teaching and training in Angola.
4. South Sudan - Waraka - Opportunity to encourage believers in Burundi in May.
5. Poland - Piotr Zarembo/Jim LaRose - Continued opportunities to love and care for orphans who fled Ukraine.
6. US - Gary Howell - Officially in remission from colon cancer!

FOR PRAYER

1. Zimbabwe - van Wyk - Support for the outreaches of Charl's ministry partner, Cozmore, in remote areas.
2. Ukraine - Protection and wisdom for believers in eastern Ukraine.
3. South Africa - Relief and healing from debilitating headaches for Cynara (Cindi) Parris.
4. South Africa - Fifi Smith - Wisdom and guidance while planning a trip to visit and encourage supporters in US.



PO Box 7575, Tempe, AZ 85281 (480) 968-4100 (888) 918-4100
intouchmission@intouchmission.org | fb.com/intouchmission
@intouchmission | instagram.com/intouchmissioninternational



A higher standard.
A higher purpose.



Scan to Donate