

Session 2

Celebrating my country



Different languages

Transcarpathia is the only Ukrainian region that borders four countries – Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. Languages spoken there include Russian, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Romanian, Slovak and Polis, and sometimes dialects drawing on several languages mixed together.

12-year-old Milan explained: “I’m proud [to be from Transcarpathia] because the people over

there are very interesting, very unique. We speak a lot of languages in Transcarpathia and there’s people from every country in Eastern Europe. I speak Ukrainian, English, Hungarian, Polish, Croatian. A little bit of Montenegrin and a little bit of Spanish.”



Discussion: As a group, count how many different languages you can speak or understand. How have you learned these? How might it benefit you to know more than one language? How might it affect a community to have people living there who are from a wide range of ethnicities, nationalities and cultures? How might it affect a church group such as the one you belong to?

Activity: Use Google Translate or another translation app to find out how Milan would say “I am proud to be from Transcarpathia” in each of the languages he speaks.

Breadbasket of Europe: The fertile soils of Ukraine create the perfect condition for growing sunflowers, corn, soybeans, wheat, barley and potatoes. Ukraine can provide enough food for half a billion people or more and is among the top three exporters of wheat and other agricultural grain products in the world. It is the world’s largest producer of sunflower seed products and is the major exporter of these in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. However, Transcarpathia, being a mountainous region, has fewer natural resources and this can lead to poverty and unemployment in comparison to the rest of Ukraine.

Sunflowers: As mentioned above, sunflowers and sunflower seed products are one of Ukraine’s most important crops and became increasingly so when vegetable oils rose in popularity as being healthier than animal-based fats. You may have noticed that, when the war with Russia began, the supermarket shelves in the UK were empty of sunflower oil as so much of our supply came from Ukraine. Not surprisingly, sunflowers are the national flower of Ukraine and can often be found embroidered on fabrics and painted on walls, furniture and household items as part of a folk art known as *petrykivka*. They are also woven into wreaths for girls to wear at celebrations.



Bible Link: Matthew 6:28-30
<https://bit.ly/4iqn0UY>

Activity: Using a plain ceramic plate and ceramic pens, a paper plate and felt tips, or a wooden craft box (available from shops such as The Works) and paints, design your own *petrykivka* painting. You could search online to see other examples of the painting to inspire you. As you paint, think about the words of Jesus in Matthew – I wonder what God might be saying to you in these words.

RCT – Agriculture Project: Under the pressures of war, food insecurity has grown. The Reformed Church in Transcarpathia (RCT) runs an Agriculture Project. The farm provides for the whole ecosystem of the area. It produces its own meat and milk, and produces its own vegetables which are then distributed. The ‘Seeds of Hope’ project provides an opportunity for members of the community and congregation to grow at least part of their foodstuffs and provisions to support the operation of the soup kitchens.



Think of the food you have eaten today – thank God for all those people involved, from the source of the foodstuffs to it appearing on your plate, including God for God's part in the process.

Action Point: The Reformed Church in Transcarpathia runs an agriculture project to provide food for those in need. Could your group collect food items (tins and dried foods) to donate to a local food bank? Money donated through the United Reformed Church's appeal will also go to support projects like the agriculture project in Transcarpathia, so an alternative might be to organise some fundraising, perhaps by baking cakes to sell or something else food-related.

National costume and music:

Watch <https://bit.ly/4bW1Xaj>

Transcarpathia has ten regional variations to its traditional costume. However, pieces from the different regions are often worn together. Originally the style of your clothing indicated to others what part of the country you came from. In the part closest to Hungary, the costumes are easily recognisable as typically Hungarian. The traditional music, often used to accompany dancing, is rhythmic and uses some typically Ukrainian instruments such as the duba (bagpipes), trembita (horn) and tsymbali (dulcimer). More recently, Ukrainian Ruslana won the Eurovision Song Contest in 2024 with her song 'Wild Dances' <https://bit.ly/4hG3NNO>, which has distinct links to traditional music from that region.

Easter Eggs: You may have seen intricately decorated eggs around Easter time. These eggs, called *pysanka*, originate in Ukraine and are traditionally coloured and patterned using wax and dye in a method similar to batik. You can watch one being designed and made here:

<https://bit.ly/41J4Cj3>.

In Ukraine, *pysanky* are typically made to be given to family members and respected outsiders as a symbolic gift of life.



Recipe: Hombovtsi

Use the recipe in the intergenerational celebration to make a sunflower loaf with pesto. Alternatively, why not have a go at making this traditional Transcarpathian treat – *hombovtsi*.

Ingredients for cheese balls

- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp salt
- 130g sugar
- 250g semolina
- 250g wheat flour
- 900g cottage cheese

Topping ingredients

- 350g ready-made breadcrumbs
- 100 – 150g sugar



Method

Before you start, mix the topping ingredients together in a small bowl and set aside for later. Strain the cottage cheese through a sieve then beat in two eggs. Stir in salt, semolina, sugar and sifted flour and knead with your hands into a dough. (If you prefer your *hombovtsi* less dense, you can use less semolina and flour).

Split the dough and mould it into ball shapes with your hands. Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to the boil and then drop the dough balls gently into the water. Stir for the first two minutes to make sure they don't stick together, then cook on a low heat, uncovered, for 15-20 minutes until they have puffed up and risen to the surface of the water. Take them off the heat, strain off the water, then roll in the breadcrumb mixture until coated. Serve with soured cream or fruit sauce.

Discussion: If you were to meet someone from Transcarpathia, what would you tell them about the country you live in or the country where you grew up? What makes you proud to be from that country?

Do you think it is important to be proud of your country? What is the difference between pride in your country and nationalism?

