

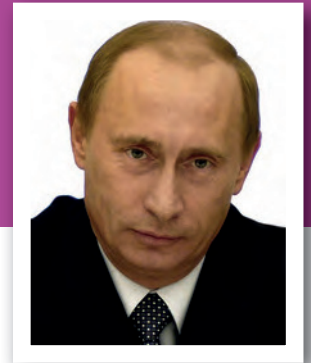
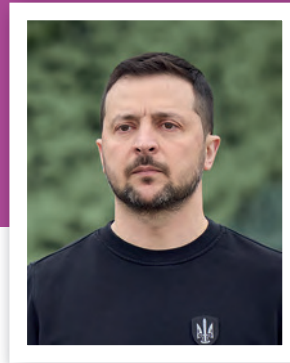
Session 4

Living in a war zone



Bible link: Psalm 46:9-10 ⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.
¹⁰ 'Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.'

Prayer: Find a picture of Vladimir Putin, president of Russia, and a picture of Volodymyr Zelenskyy, president of Ukraine. Ask God to guide these two leaders and to bring about peace. The psalm says, "Be still, and know that I am God". Take a few moments to sit quietly after your prayer.



Russia, which ceded control of Ukraine in 1991, invaded the country from the north, south and east in the early hours of 24 February 2022. Fighting between the two countries started almost immediately. Russian troops rapidly approached the capital city of Kyiv, but met more resistance than they initially expected. War has continued to be waged in the country, with February 2025 marking three years of this conflict. The invasion has resulted in many families fleeing the country or region in which they lived. Those that were left behind found themselves living in a war zone.

For young people in Ukraine, there is a significant impact on their homes, their education, their mental health. Many people find themselves homeless or living under the fear of their house being destroyed at any time. Even those homes which remain untouched by the bombing and missile strikes are affected in other ways, with frequent power cuts and damage to things like water supplies.

Game: Play Jenga or try to build a tower with playing cards. The damage to a house of Jenga bricks or cards can be the source of amusement, but the reality is far, far different.

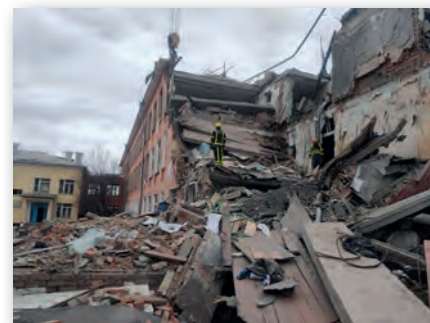
Prayer: Play the game again, but this time as you place each brick or card, thank God for something that homes provide, such as warmth, shelter, a place to be with family etc. Then, as the houses tumble, pray for those without a safe place to live.



After the years of education being hit by the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, the schooling of many children and young people in Ukraine is being affected again by the impact of war. Many schools are being taken over and used for military use, prisons and for medical facilities, while many others have been destroyed. Those fortunate enough to still access an education often have to either attend underground schools or work online, although online studies can often fall victim to outages of electricity or the internet.

Being able to go to school has meant learning new procedures in order to stay safe. If a siren sounds, signalling a possible attack, the children are to make their way to the basement, sometimes having to stay there for many hours until the all clear. But yet the children remain hopeful and optimistic.

One young girl describes her time at school: "I am so happy to be back at school. Our old school was destroyed by a missile, but everybody knows it will be rebuilt soon, and it will become even better."



It is telling that, for many children and young people, hearing the siren and moving to a place of safety such as an underground basement has become something they have grown accustomed to and they just relocate and carry on with schoolwork until it is safe to return to their normal classroom.



Activity: The Ukrainian alphabet, used for reading and writing Ukrainian, is a Cyrillic script similar to that of Russian and very different to the lettering used for English. It has 33 letters in total. Sometimes you might see Ukrainian words written out the way they sound for people who are not accustomed to reading the Cyrillic alphabet. Use this copy of the alphabet to have a go at writing some Ukrainian letters. How neatly can you write them? Every few letters, move to sit or kneel or stand in a different place, maybe under a table or in a far corner of the room. Does that affect your concentration at all?

Ukrainian Cyrillic alphabet / Українська кирилиця абетка											
А а	Б б	В в	Г г	Ґ ґ	Д д	Е е	Є є	Ж ж	З з	И и	
І і	Ї ї	Й й	К к	Л л	М м	Н н	О о	П п	Р р	С с	
Т т	У у	Ф ф	Х х	Ц ц	Ч ч	Ш ш	Щ щ	Ь ь	Я я	Ю ю	

effects of war, or to children and young people in Transcarpathia who have left their homes, and maybe even family, behind them because the place they lived was too dangerous to stay in? How could the Church help these people?

Everyone experiences difficult situations at some time in their life and most of us have ups and downs, times we feel really happy and times when we feel really miserable or fed up. These times can come and go and we can soon put the less pleasant times behind us. But when they start to mount up or are extreme, we can experience stress and trauma. A traumatic event usually means we feel threatened emotionally or physically and can be a one-off or can be continuous over time. Trauma itself is not a mental health condition but it can contribute to mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, self-harm and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Everyone's experience is different and the ways it affects people can be different too. Trauma can show itself in the way people behave: shouting, crying, hiding, stealing, hitting out at self or others – or maybe not at all.

The effects of the war have had an impact on the mental health of teenagers and young people, with an estimated 43% needing support. Kateryna Bazyl, a child psychologist who works with the charity 'Voices of Children', says this of Ukraine children and their mental health:

"We witness a catastrophic number of children who started turning to us with different unpleasant symptoms, we have a very long queue." This video shows you just some of the impact on children and young people: <https://bit.ly/4kQi3qe>

The situation for young people and children is not helped by the fact that they are not the only ones experiencing trauma. The war in Ukraine is having an understandably negative effect on the mental health of the adults around them. And often these might be parents or carers acting alone as other adults in the family are away with the army or have left as refugees.

Discuss: What helps you when you are feeling anxious or worried or low? What sort of support do you think might be offered to children and young people in Ukraine who are experiencing the

Action Point: What websites or organisations exist in your country to support young people who are experiencing mental health difficulties? Research and make sure you have a list of them somewhere, together with information on how to contact them, so that you are ready to support anyone you meet who might need a bit of extra help. You could also ask your church whether they have anyone who has completed mental health awareness training or the Youth Mental Health First Aid course, reminding them that the latter is often offered free of charge from the URC Children's and Youth Work team.

Watch: <https://bit.ly/4kKw4FL>

This is one way in which UNICEF (The United Nations Children's Fund) is reaching out to children, young people and their families to tackle the impact of war on their mental health. UNICEF is just one charity working in Ukraine – there are many others doing this too. But there are lots of people needing them.

Activity: Using the information from this page and any other facts you discover when doing your own research to plan and create your own news report. It is probably best to focus on one area of life a child in a war zone may be facing. Consider whose perspective you are reporting from: the child, the reporter or perhaps someone from the UK. The link above might also help you plan.

War, however, does not stop children and young people finding ways to play together or to interact directly or with their phones. A mobile phone is often a most treasured possession. Can you imagine why?

