

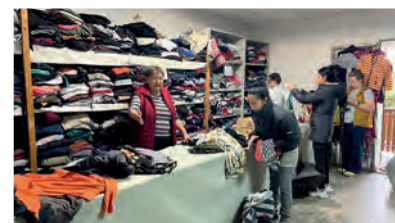
Session 5

All are welcome



Bible Link: Matthew 25:35 and 40

“I was hungry, and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. I was alone and away from home, and you invited me into your house. Truly, I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”



Discussion: What sort of support do you think people might need, arriving in a new country or area for the first time with only as many possessions as they can carry? Why might a Christian want to do something to help?

Due to its location and its history, Transcarpathia is home to a very mixed population and a wide range of languages are spoken, including Russian, Hungarian, Romanian and Ukrainian. As a result, the multi-cultural population of the area has a reputation for being welcoming and hospitable to incomers. And now people from across eastern Ukraine are finding themselves seeking sanctuary as displaced people – in fact, the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia (RCT) has responded to the physical and the spiritual needs of over 35,000 internally displaced persons. The oldest protestant church in Ukraine, the RCT, is working in partnership with the Hungarian Reformed Church Aid Agency to provide support and welcome as people arrive in the area, particularly supporting the most vulnerable in a variety of different ways, including providing shelter in over 40 locations. This is even though their own congregations and income have dwindled due to the war.



Transcarpathia is also home to an ethnic group known as Roma who in the past have lived a nomadic lifestyle, moving from place to place. They might also be known as travellers, although many have now settled among the local population and no longer move

from place to place. A quarter of the Roma in Ukraine live in Transcarpathia and more have arrived there as displaced persons. The Roma people are often marginalised in whatever country they find themselves and have historically suffered from discrimination, oppression and violations of their human rights. Children often struggle educationally. They live in camps, often quite distant from schools, doctors' surgeries, shops etc, and facilities and housing in these areas can be poor. Seeing the extra support that the Roma people may need at this time, the Reformed

Church in Transcarpathia has set up an after-school network and kindergartens for Roma children where they can receive education and support in various school subjects and in life skills, be provided with school materials, and get a warm meal.



14-year-old Alexandra, who is Roma, says, “When we get sick as children, it is difficult for my mother... It causes difficulty to manage to get the medications whenever we are sick. And because my family is separated, most of the family members are not at home here, but outside of the country. And I wish that the war

would come to an end and we would be together.” When asked if she has anything to say to teenagers in the UK, Alexandra said, “Keep up or stay committed to your dreams. So stick to your dreams.” Her dream is to grow up quickly and become a kindergarten (nursery) nurse. I wonder what your dreams might be?

Discussion: What groups in the UK might find themselves particularly marginalised or vulnerable and need a welcome and practical support? Do you know of any projects run by churches across the country or in your area to support people with particular support needs? What might motivate the Christians in Transcarpathia to reach out to the marginalised and vulnerable in their community?

Discussion: What are your dreams? Do you have any ambitions? How might you set about achieving your dreams? What helps you and what might you need?

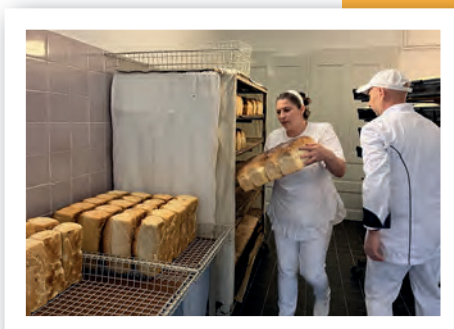


Watch: <https://bit.ly/41QfP1n> to see how some internally displaced families are being supported by the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia.

The Beregszasz Diaconal Coordination Centre

coordinates a lot of the social work offered by the RCT in Transcarpathia. It reaches out in particular to those experiencing poverty, hunger and unemployment, to children and the elderly and to those with additional needs and disabilities, catering for their physical needs but also for their mental, emotional and spiritual needs.

The Church distributes almost 30,000 meals a year across the 23 soup kitchens in the region. This service not only provides a much-needed warm meal each day but, just as importantly, provides a meeting place for people. Many of the elderly and vulnerable people feel alone and abandoned, with other family members having left for other countries as refugees or having stayed to fight in other parts of Ukraine, so the opportunity to come together boosts morale and combats depression. It also provides an opportunity to pray and worship together.



The Centre also runs a bakery, providing 300 loaves of bread a day, which are distributed among the needy, and an agricultural project which invests in self-sustainable food practices and allows members to grow/produce some of their own food and to support the operation of the soup kitchens.

Care for the Elderly: Almond Tree Elderly Home opened in 2006 and expanded to include a dementia care home in 2009. It now provides a home for 37 elderly people. The home care service supports 340 elderly people in need, including home visits to check in on homebound individuals. Where elderly people might formerly have been cared for by their families, many are now alone as their younger families and individuals have left the country or are unable to travel.

Other needs: The RCT also provides camps for refugee children, retreats for visually impaired children and those with additional support needs, and retreats for military chaplains. It also provides clothing banks to provide for people's basic needs. Although many people have left Ukraine, all 76 pastors from the

RCT have stayed, encouraging a spirit of resilience among the community with their commitment and service. They say, "It is in our DNA as Christians to give to others."

Action Point:

You don't have to live in a war zone to find elderly people who feel lonely and alone. Craft some flowers or make some cheerful cards to give to people at a nearby care home, thinking carefully about what sort of message you might want to write. Your group could maybe even arrange a visit to deliver them and chat with some of the residents.

Prayer: Use Lego or similar construction materials to make the shape of a house or church with open doors. As you place each brick, think of someone who may need the church's help or welcome, or someone you've heard about who offers that to others. Pray that God will be near them and help them.

Many churches in the UK have opened their doors, and people across the country often opened their homes to people who are refugees from Ukraine, just as the Church in Transcarpathia is trying to help internally displaced people from their own country.

Activity: *Sochniki* is a Ukrainian curd cheese pasty.

To make them you need:

- ready-made shortcrust pastry
- 340g cottage cheese
- 1 egg
- 2 tbsp soured cream
- 3 tbsp plain flour
- 4 tbsp granulated sugar
- 1 egg yolk for brushing

Preheat the oven to 180C/Gas Mark 4. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Roll the pastry to about 1/8 thick and use a cookie cutter to cut out 10cm circles. Blend the cottage cheese with a fork and mix in egg, sugar, sour cream and flour. Place 2 tbsp of the mix on one half of the circle and fold the other half over, pressing down lightly to seal. Brush with egg and bake for 20-25 minutes.

