

East Ukraine

Ministering To Churches In The War Zone

Later this year, the churches in East Ukraine's war zone will experience a rare evangelistic media campaign.

Churches in the zone will work together with GCMM to reach two million Ukrainians living in a region called "Donbas."

The campaign will target a 400 km stretch of Ukrainian territory currently occupied by hybrid Russian forces.

Stretching from the port city of Mariupol on the Sea of Azov to the vicinity of the city of Luhansk, the last major city in the occupied territory.

The campaign will be conducted in unusual circumstances. The

sounds of war can be heard daily from almost every village along the front lines. In January alone, The Minsk peace agreement signed was broken 200 times in just one 24-hour period.

Recently a small delegation of army chaplains visited the GCMM ministry center in Finland.

Chaplains Albert Homyak, Eduard Tyomny and Chaplain Yevgeni Kovalenko from the village of Chermolyk described the ministry of a chaplain in the war zone.

Chermolyk is located only a few hundred meters from active military activity. We asked Yevgeni, what his duties as a Chaplain include?

— We have served as Army Chaplains for over 15 years. Our task is

to assist people living through tough times. We serve in areas where the war has brought much suffering and anxiety.

— Recently we visited European capitals to tell the people about the plight of Christians in the war zone. Europeans were ignorant of the ongoing conflict in East Ukraine.

They said the conflict had ended. In reality the crisis is just beginning to escalate.

During the recent crisis 24 Ukrainian sailors were arrested

by Russian forces. They were to arrive in Mariupol. Albert, how did the residents of Mariupol react to this incident?

— Yes these ships were headed to Mariupol to defend the city. The vessels were sent to defend our city in the event of an attack from the Sea.

— This was a heavy blow to us. The very people who came to defend us were arrested. This was the first time that such an attack has happened. Several were wounded in the incident and the sailors are in a custody in Moscow.

Photo: An outdoor prayer meeting on the outskirts of the city of Mariupol. With Russian weaponry just 15 miles away, believers hold hands and pray "Lord, protect our city..."



In the photo: In the war zone residents stay on the roads. Straying onto the surrounding fields can be fatal. Land mines and unexploded munitions present a constant threat.

Albert, GCM Ministries is planning a Power to Change media campaign in the conflict zone...

– The conflict zone is about 20 km from Mariupol. Military activity can be seen from our window. Everyday we lose soldiers or civilians. The war continues. We live very close to the thunder of heavy guns. Mariupol is the largest Ukrainian city in the war-zone.

Yevgeni, you live in the village of Chermolyk, located along a river separating Ukrainian and Russian troops. Within a few hundred meters is occupied territory. People live there...

– Regardless of the war, life must continue. A Chaplain not only preaches the Word of God but also teaches the people how to get by amidst challenging circumstances. They need to be taught how to move about where fields dotted with land mines, where there is no freedom of

movement.

– The people need to know how to live their daily lives in daylight when there is no military activity. After sunset, hostilities erupt. When residential areas are targeted people need to find cover, move to the safety of cellars, etc. When we have a fire, there are no fire trucks, no fire department. People join hands to fight the fire with whatever means they have at their disposal.

– They need to take care when they move about outside. They may step on a land mine. We had one incident recently. Because there are no ambulances we called on soldiers, medics who come to the assistance of wounded people. You have to learn to live in these circumstances.

– There are about 150 children in our village. All public events are held during daylight hours. Often, as darkness falls these same meeting places are targeted by enemy fire. All of this makes it difficult to live in these circumstances.

– We can see the enemy forces with the naked eye. In the same way, they too can see us without binoculars. If they spot an unidentifiable vehicle or group of people, they open fire.

– They even opened fire on a school celebrating summer break. The parents shielded their children with their own bodies as they rushed for cover.

Albert, why don't the people just leave the war zone?

– Evacuation from the war zone is not an option if there is no place to evacuate to.

– There is not enough housing in Mariupol or any other place for people to go. People seek solutions to their own situation. Sometimes people have been graciously allowed to stay in communal homes. People know that they are not greatly desired, sought after in the homes of strangers. So, many have stayed behind to protect their houses and

property the best they can.

Yevgeni: – I want to add that before this war began Chaplains were not greatly respected. But when war broke out, responsibility for evacuations fell into the hands of these same Chaplains.

For example, Albert was on the move constantly as were the rest of us. Our sacrificial service and assistance to those trapped in the war zone was noticed and we were recognized for the professional care rendered to these people in despair. We sought donations from our churches.

I too personally donated everything from my home: mattresses, blankets, cutlery and cooking utensils. I ended up sleeping on the floor with my sons. It was more important to me to help others in need.

Albert: – About 2.5 million people remain in the conflict zone with one two million people on the Ukrainian side.

Eduard, do you have contact with the churches in Donetsk and Luhansk? We hear that

the churches are facing great adversity...

– At the beginning of the war, we did have contact. Often, we would visit the prisons and prison camps and minister to people there. Currently, it is not possible for representatives of evangelical churches to minister. Only Moscow's Orthodox Church has access. There is a lot of hostility toward evangelical churches.

Albert: – They have passed a law stating that all churches in the conflict zone must re-register with the authorities.

– I talked to one pastor who went to numerous government offices repeatedly. No one would sign his re-registration documents. Because of the refusal of the authorities to validate the papers they were declared illegal.

– In the occupied areas the government required churches to re-register but at the same time they created conditions that made it impossible to re-register.

Jevgeni, you have moved to the village of Chermolyk, in the conflict zone.

– Yes, in January of 2015 my friend Albert Homyak invited me to visit his home.

We visited the war zone where we met with our met with our soldiers. We also visited with people living in the area.

They had been living a normal life with dreams and aspirations regarding their future. But in a brief moment, they had lost everything they owned.

– Those who were able, fled. Others stayed behind. Of the 3,000 people living in Chermolyk only 1,000 people stayed behind. Everyone else left the area.

– This deeply touched my heart. I felt it was God's call for my life. At first, we visited the villages and then decided to plant new churches. Currently, we have three new churches in the villages of Chermolyk, Orlovsk and Pavlopol, all in the war zone.

(Continued on next page)



In the photo: Army Chaplain Albert (center) was our guide in the war zone. Hannu tries on a soldier's heavy head gear—and not very comfortable. The Apostle Paul says: "Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit..." Ef.6:17.



Hunger for the Word of God

– People are open to the ministry of the Word of God. There is a hunger. They realize that no one is able to help them. Only God can bring them help.

– And so, that is why they have sought Him in earnest. We understood that this was God's call to us to minister to these people. We landed in these villages like marines landing on a beach.

Church planting was our primary goal," Yevgeni Kovalenko says. We must not stop what has been started because these people are important to God. They are like orphaned children. That's why God has called us to care for them.

GCM Ministries has financed the building of a chicken farm close to the conflict zone...

Albert: – This chicken farm is located in the village I live in. We live in Chervonoye, on the outskirts of Mariupol.

– The broiler farm is of great importance to the whole ministry. There is no longer a shortage of meat-based protein for the many children in "Pilgrim" orphanage.

– The farm produces enough meat for the facility for the elderly in Demyanovka. They are physically restricted.

We also deliver broilers to the soldiers on the front lines when we travel to hold services and minister to them.

We also help families with adopted children. No matter what happens people always need to eat, and meat is part of a person's normal diet.

Yevgeni: – I'd like to add that the broiler farm is built and operates like a European facility. We have air-conditioning, showers and the workers wear white overalls. I haven't seen a similar place like this in Mariupol.

– And each time I come to the "Pilgrim" orphanage at meal time the aroma from the kitchen is amazing.

The children now have meat to eat, thank God. And, when we visit the soldiers and villagers in the conflict zone we take along 30–50 kilos (65–110 lbs) of broiler meat.

Albert: – The "Pilgrim" orphanage is a place for orphans live in abnormally challenging circumstances in their young life. Either they have no father or mother or the parents are not sober enough to care for their children.

– Perhaps the worst thing is that people grow accustomed to living in the shadow of war. Once, we took some humanitarian aid to the village of Granitnoye. I met a woman who had two children. One was five, the other a bit older.

– We met on the street and gave her some food aid, and spoke with her. Suddenly, a short distance away we heard explosions.

– Instinctively I ducked, but the 40 year old woman said: "Don't be afraid, the explosions are to the right

of us, near buffer zone where our soldiers are stationed."

– This lady, who had lived in the war zone from the beginning, was able to clearly identify the type of weaponry used, and where it was used. This was a scary development.

– Today, if a child is injured, the child receives first aid immediately. Buildings damaged by shelling are repaired without delay as well. At the start of the war, damaged homes stood empty for up to a year. Now we have teams of construction workers to repair them as soon as possible.

Albert, you are the father of 13 adopted children. How do you manage to take care of them?

– Let me make a slight correction, I am the father of 14 children. We took in another boy December 23. Our family continues to grow.

– First of all, we are followers of Christ. And our fellow brothers and sisters do help us. Among them are

friends from Canada and the US, and Finland.

– Representatives from GCM Ministries has visited us several times. You visited our "Pilgrim" home for orphaned children.

You have supported us with gifts and much needed supplies. You helped us build a very good chicken farm. This past Christmas, you brought us a new washer, dryer and a refrigerator. I am so thankful that our many friends have financially supported this joint project.

The support came from GCM Ministries partners. Eduard, what can you say about the upcoming evangelistic media campaign?

– The timing for this campaign is strategic and comes at a time when we need it. Family members and relatives living in the war zone have been separated from each other. Some live in the occupied territory while others

live in Ukraine.

– The people are divided even in the villages and towns. Some relatives live on opposite sides of the conflict. They do not live in peace with one another. They need to forgive each other. Otherwise no change will take place. This is an urgent item for prayer. Things do change through prayer.

The fate of an abandoned child is in the hands of the parents. Yevgeni, this must be familiar to you.

– The Bible says: Give to the needy and feed the orphans. At "Pilgrim" orphanage, we have decided that if something happens to the parents we won't send the children to a government controlled care center. For this reason, Albert has taken the most desperate children that nobody else wanted.

– These children have been through hell and nobody cares. They



Military chaplain Gennady and Hannu pray with soldiers in a bunker in the war-zone. Gennady is pastor of the largest church in Mariupol. He also manages the Mariupol orphanage and children's home and facility for the disabled elderly. GCM Ministries financed a broiler farm for the children and adults in the war-zone, on a regular basis providing broilers to those in these shelters.

would have ended up in a government facility and most likely they would have become criminals, violent, murders. They would have ended up in prison for life.

– Albert has adopted them and I am 90% sure that these children will grow up as good people. This is a work of God. Albert could not do this alone.

Albert, The Apostle Paul writes about the ministry of reconciliation in 2. Cor. 5:19. We are ambassadors of Christ.

– We all need to experience change. We have lived in the shadow of war for the past five years. We cannot live without reconciliation. As Christians we have been entrusted with the message of reconciliation.

– Without reconciliation nothing good will happen. We are trusting that this planned media campaign will convict people of change, forgiveness, reconciliation.

– The Church wants to extend a helping hand to all who need it. We pray that an explosion of love in the Donbas region will produce good fruit. I believe it will be the beginning of peace in East Ukraine.

Eduard, anything to add to this?

– I would like to see reconciliation happen in families that have been torn apart by politics and war.

– That the campaign message will touch the souls of children who have suffered because of the war and adults who have remained in the war-zone, not being able to move away because of lack of infrastructure.

– Each side blames the other. We need a change of heart on both sides. This is why the campaign is so important in the war-zone.

You've got the last word Albert.

– As a pastor, a Chaplain, a servant of God and father of 14 adopted children, I would like to thank our brothers and sisters, all

the supporters who have not turned a blind-eye to this catastrophe in East Ukraine.

– Thank you for your financial support and prayers. I certainly see the benefits of humanitarian aid, but we also need your prayers as we travel inside the war-zone with exploding land mines. The Lord is our Protector and provides safety.

– Please continue to pray for Ukraine, for children and people in this area who suffer and who crave peace and a normal life. God bless you and thank you.

Yevgeni: – A big thank you to you. Our prayer is that you would never experience this kind of suffering.

– May your children grow up safe and happy. May you be healthy and happy. We love you.

Andrei Motinga
Hannu Haukka



GCM Ministries has provided broilers from the chicken farm, to children and to the soldiers in the conflict zone. The most important part of this trip was prayer. We prayed for and encouraged soldiers at our every stop. Photo: Chaplain Albert checks the weight of a heavy sniper rifle.



Photo, above:
On the shore of the Sea of Azov. This freshly dug trench is only one hundred meters (100 yds) from Gennady's home. Some of Gennady's 33 children in the photo. Some of the children are too young to understand the purpose of these trenches.

Photo, right:
This young child born in the war zone is fortunate to have been taken in by Gennady's team.





Photo 1
Hannu ministering in a worship service in the town of Pavlopol. The surrounding area is under artillery fire on a daily basis.

Photo 2
Children, adults, moms and dads come together to worship at house services.

Photo 3
Children take part in the Christmas program.

Photo 4
Broilers from the GCM Ministries broiler farm distributed to families in the war zone villages. Supermarkets do not exist.

Photo 5
GCM Ministries brought gifts for the children. Candy was a special treat. The local village store does not have provisions for children.

Photo 6
On the shore of the Sea of Azov. This freshly dug trench is only one hundred meters (100 yds) from Gennady's home. Some of Gennady's 33 children in the photo. Some of the children are too young to understand the purpose of the trenches.

Photo 7
One thousand chickens are raised per cycle at Gennady's Children's Home chicken farm. Soon they will have 200 egg-laying chickens. The menu at the orphanage is expanding.

Photo 8
December 28, 2018. GCM Ministries purchased and delivered a new washer and dryer and a clothes press. There is no shortage of laundry with so many children.