



First
Presbyterian
Church
of Waynesboro, Virginia

The Columns *Online*

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Global partners in Eastern Europe coping with the refugees fleeing Ukraine

by Kathy Melvin, *Presbyterian News Service*

(PNS) — Ellen Smith, World Mission’s regional liaison for Eastern Europe, has just returned from a visit with partners in Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland to see first-hand how they are coping with the enormous task of caring for refugees fleeing Ukraine and how the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) can accompany them.

“What I saw was heart-wrenching, but also filled me with hope,” she said. “I saw ordinary people doing extraordinary things. They were completely overwhelmed, but receiving people with open hearts, compassion and love. No one had an abundance of resources, but they were focused on what they could do by working together.”



Smith.

Smith said she was impressed with the way Germans are handling the large influx of refugees.

continued

Coping with the refugees fleeing Ukraine, *continued*

“The Germans are receiving people with compassion,” said Smith. “They’re very organized, and that’s wonderful. And they’re very protective. There were signs in Russian and Ukrainian everywhere. They were doing a great job, but they’re overwhelmed.”

Deutsche Bahn, the German train system, is offering free tickets to Ukrainians for any destination in Germany they choose.

In Prague, Smith met with members of the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren, a PC(USA) global partner. Although small in area, the Czech Republic has received 300,000 refugees. By dispersing refugees into smaller places, they have been able to provide emergency shelter, but realize it’s only a temporary solution. They have begun thinking ahead to long-term shelter solutions, realizing there is no end in sight for the conflict.

“The refugees are women and children and the elderly, a very vulnerable group,” said Smith. “They realize it is important to take good care of them and protect them. Often, the refugees are confused, and not sure what to do. The men have stayed behind to fight.”

“The sensitivity of the people I met for these refugees and watching them and caring for them and understanding their needs was just really impressive,” said Smith. “They were phenomenal.”

Smith said these churches are small without a lot of capacity, but they have been creative about finding ways to help. One church that previously operated a daycare has opened its doors to educate Ukrainian children. Churches around the country have opened their doors to refugees and church members are taking refugees into their homes.

But everyone realizes this is only a short-term solution. ECCB is looking at solutions for converting existing structures into long-term housing and Smith said they are preparing a project proposal to involve the PC(USA).

Smith’s next stop was Warsaw, where she met with the Evangelical Reformed Church of Poland. There she met a pastor emeritus who has become deeply engaged in helping refugees. A member of his congregation called to say her family was at the border but had no way to travel to their city. The pastor’s response was, “Let’s get in the car and go.” They waited eight hours for the family to cross. They are now settled into temporary housing.

“Hearts in Poland have responded unbelievably,” said Smith, “and they are not treating these people like refugees, but like people. And that’s a really important factor to preserving their dignity.”

The Polish government has offered 40 zloty per person per day to support refugees, which is less than \$10. The churches have worked to bridge the gap. A church in Warsaw organized a fundraiser and people not only contributed but pledged to contribute on a regular basis.

Smith said the biggest challenge there is permanent housing as well. In Warsaw they are looking at converting an old nursing home into apartments for 12 families. However, there is a labor shortage because the Ukrainian men the Poles have relied on for construction labor have gone home to fight

Presbyterians have donated more than \$4 million through Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, which has committed rapid response solidarity grants to five ecumenical partners addressing the humanitarian crisis created by the unprovoked attack and plan to continue to walk alongside Ukraine long-term.

Music Notes for Easter.

The Lord is Risen! He is Risen indeed, Alleluia!

We continue to celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ on the first Sunday after Easter. This week, we are blessed to hear Paul Jones sing one of the most popular tunes written by Bill and Gloria Gaither, *Because He Lives*. The Gaithers met while teaching at Alexandria Monroe High School in Indiana (Gloria taught French, Bill taught English). They married in 1962 and soon began writing songs together.



The Gaithers.

They devoted their lives to music and songwriting full-time in 1967, and have penned more than 700 gospel songs in the last half century. In 2000, ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers) named the Gaithers Christian Songwriters of the Century.

Penned in 1971, *Because He Lives* celebrated its 50th anniversary last year. When the Gaithers wrote their now-famous song, they experienced what they call an “aha” moment after the birth of their third child.

“We live our lives with confidence because the Resurrection is true. We held our son and said, ‘We can do this. We can raise this child in this unstable world because of the power of life. Life wins! And because our Lord is alive, we can trust Him with our future.’ Honestly, it was a song we wrote for us.”

Our Worship Channels

click on the logos



This Week in History.



Charles Chaplin born
in London, England.
April 16, 1889



U.S. backed invasion of Cuba
to overthrow Fidel Castro
fails spectacularly.
April 17, 1961



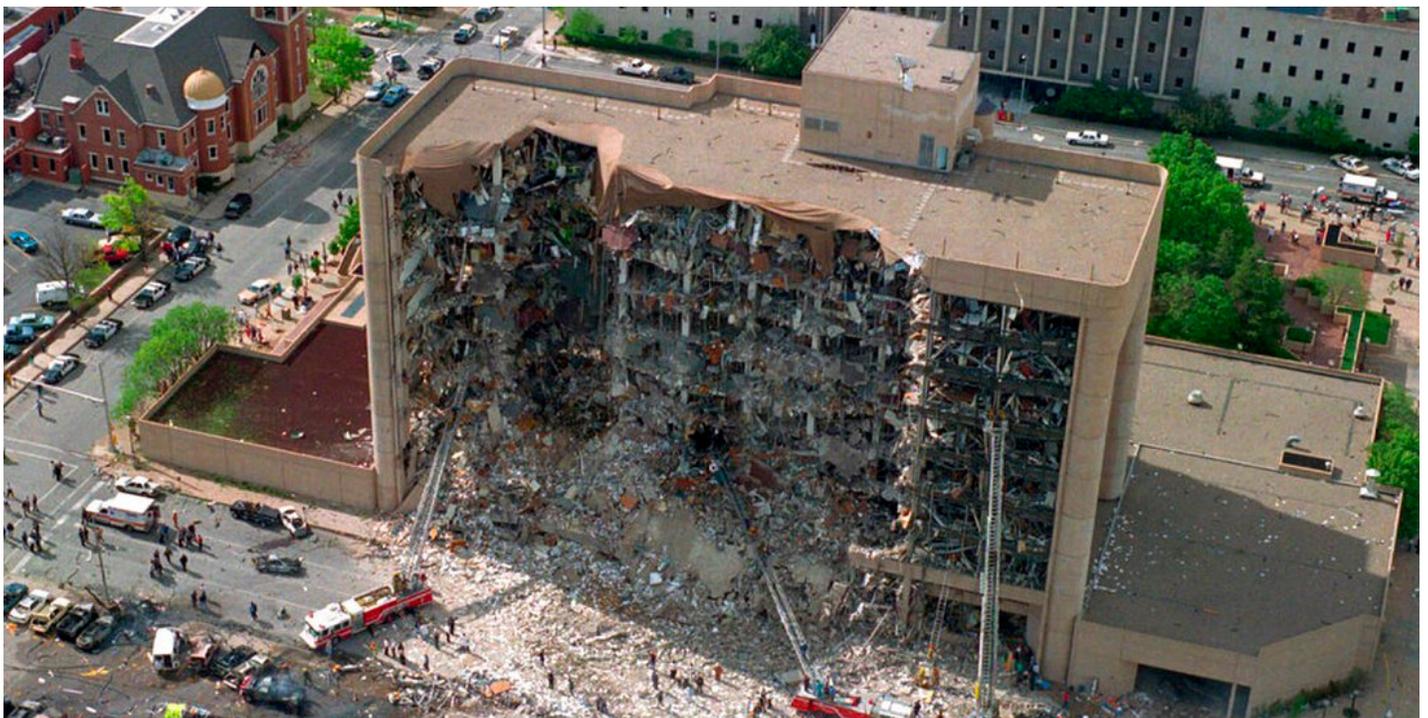
Paul Revere and William Dawes
ride northwest from Boston,
warning of the British approach
April 18, 1775



Major earthquake destroys
San Francisco, CA.
April 18, 1906



American Revolution begins
with skirmish at Lexington, MA
April 19, 1775



Massive truck rocks the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, OK, killing 168.
April 10, 1995