

A CANADIAN PASTORAL LETTER ON

# UKRAINE, CANADA AND THE CHURCH

As we approach the second anniversary of Russia's  
full-scale invasion of Ukraine

FEBRUARY 24, 2024



# AS WE APPROACH THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF RUSSIA'S FULL-SCALE INVASION OF UKRAINE

*A Canadian Pastoral Letter*  
ON UKRAINE, CANADA, AND THE  
CHURCH

## INTRODUCTION

*This invitation to prayer and action for peace has grown out of a shared journey begun a year ago by Ukrainian Orthodox, Catholic, Evangelical, and other Christian leaders together with the World Evangelical Alliance's Peace & Reconciliation Network, The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, and The Canadian Council of Churches.*

*Our gatherings have explored the spiritual and historical backdrop of the conflict in Ukraine, the ongoing realities faced by Ukrainians who have been welcomed to Canada, and the prospects for peace in Ukraine. We have spent dedicated time in prayer.*

*Together we call all Christians and people of good will to join in united prayer and action for peace.*



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## PEACE IN AND FOR UKRAINE

As we approach the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and the tenth anniversary of Russia's infiltration into Eastern Ukraine and annexation of Crimea, the need and desire for peace have become more and more evident. Without in any way minimizing or ignoring the suffering and sorrow caused by war and violence in other areas of the world, we stand together in inviting Christians and all people of good will to prayerfully consider how we are all called, and might contribute to, the achievement of peace in and for Ukraine.



In the words crafted by the Commission on Justice and Peace of The Canadian Council of Churches:

Peace is a dynamic state of well-being and harmony —right relationships among people and nature where there is no fear. Nothing and no one is excluded from God's vision of peace; it includes all nations, cultures, and peoples, the whole inhabited Earth, indeed the whole cosmos. The quest for peace is at the heart of ecumenism and the shared path of reconciliation, of walking one another home.

The Canadian Council of Churches,  
“[Principles of Peace](#),” May 2018.

Not since World War II has Europe experienced the violence and destruction it now witnesses as a result of Russia's invasion. Our entire world has been affected by the Ukrainian refugee crisis, the economic fallout, and the difficulty of exporting Ukrainian agricultural products (which is felt especially hard in the Global South).

The level of human suffering is massive. Hundreds of thousands of military personnel on both sides have been killed or wounded. Ukrainian civilians and civilian infrastructure—in violation of international norms—have been targeted resulting in the loss of power, water, heat, shelter, and life. Basic human rights and freedoms have been and continue to be violated, including the right to religious freedom. Of special concern is the forced removal of children from their homes and families.

The environmental impact on God's world has been enormous. The structural challenges of food security and the destruction of environmental infrastructure, such as the Kakhovka Dam, have resulted in long term challenges to ecosystems, characterized by some as "ecocide." The restoration of the Ukrainian ecosphere will take decades.



We call upon the leaders of the Russian Federation to terminate this war, to cease this unjust aggression, end the violence being perpetrated against Ukraine and its people, and to recall their military forces from within the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine—including Crimea—immediately.

### THE HOPE OF THE UKRAINIAN PEOPLE

Those who have been forced to flee the country are now refugees trying to survive in a strange society. Comprising for the most part women and children, they are separated from everything familiar to them, especially from their families, husbands, and fathers. The challenges and traumas Ukrainians have endured in their homeland, as well as their displacement throughout Canada and the world will continue to affect them for generations.

One of God's greatest gifts is freedom. Ukraine suffered under imperial domination for centuries, during which Ukrainian culture, language, and spirituality were suppressed. In defending the freedom of their country, Ukrainians seek that which we, as Canadians, often take for granted—the respect for human rights, rule of law, peace, international order, and the positive appreciation for the unique gift of the Other, their language, their culture, and their spirituality.

*Not since World War II has Europe experienced the violence and destruction it now witnesses as a result of Russia's invasion.*

We stand united with the leaders of the Christian Churches of Ukraine who, in their declaration of January 10, 2024, condemned the "Russian World" ideology that has been and continues to be used by leaders of the Russian Federation and the Russian Orthodox Church as a pretext for Russia's invasion of Ukraine.\*

\* "Heads of Ukrainian Churches condemn the ideology of the "Russian world."  
<https://irf.in.ua/p/116>



# “ONE OF GOD’S GREATEST GIFTS IS FREEDOM.”

*A Canadian Pastoral Letter on  
Ukraine, Canada and the Church*

# WHAT CAN WE DO?

Given the horrific and brutal nature of war, we ask ourselves: “What is God calling us, as Canadian Christians, to do?” For if one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it (1 Corinthians 12:26). What is God calling us to do? Simply put: “Whatever we can, wherever we are.” Everyone has a role to play.

## 1. PRAY

Pray. First of all, we are called to offer our prayers to the Triune God of Peace: prayers for the cessation of hostilities, prayers for peace, prayers for reconciliation, prayers for healing.

*What is God calling us to do? Simply put:  
“Whatever we can,  
wherever we are.”  
Everyone has a role to play.*

We encourage all Canadian Christians to pray scripture over the realities of this and every conflict, naming specific prayer needs, including the reality of the spiritual power for good over evil and light over darkness which impacts us all personally on the emotional, psychological, societal, and spiritual levels.

With our spiritual forebears we exclaim “Come, Lord Jesus” as He promised He would (Revelation 22:20).

Common prayer in the context of regular worship services as well as denominational and ecumenical prayer networks can be very powerful, for in this way we honour Jesus’ prayer, “May they be one, as we are one” (John 17:21). Remembering that Jesus Himself said “of myself I can do nothing,” let us commit this journey of suffering, justice-seeking, and love to the Lord, our God, in faith and unity (1 Samuel 17:47).

## 2. SUPPORT UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

During our shared journey, we have been struck repeatedly by the stories of regular, “everyday” Canadians who have helped and supported Ukrainian refugees personally, emotionally, socially, spiritually, and materially. The importance of offering them the hand of friendship and helping foster community both with and for them cannot be overestimated.

It is especially important that church leaders take every opportunity to encourage this ongoing faithful holistic support to Ukraine and Ukrainians, thanking those both within and beyond their congregations for the amazing level of help and support they have offered and continue to offer Ukrainian refugees.

## 3. URGE DIPLOMATIC STEPS TOWARDS A JUST AND SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN UKRAINE

Neither can we overemphasize the need to continue to lobby our government officials on the local, provincial, and federal levels. It is imperative that our leaders do all that they can diplomatically to help achieve a just and sustainable peace for Ukraine; to make it possible for Ukrainians to stay in Ukraine; and to assist Ukrainian refugees in returning to Ukraine when it will be safe to do so. Along with diplomacy, it is right for our government to offer continued humanitarian support. Along with immediate aid for Ukraine, resources should be provided for creative ways to make peace and work toward just relational, governmental, and economic structures in the region.

## 4. SEEK COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIPS OF HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT

Ukrainian and Slavic Christian congregations in Canada (Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Free, Evangelical, Pentecostal, or Independent) have served as “first response” centres during this refugee crisis. Fostering cooperative relationships between other Canadian churches and these congregations is an especially effective way to enhance humanitarian support and ecumenical engagement. These new relationships, forged in the context of suffering, can be nurtured over the long term to the mutual benefit of all.

## 5. REMEMBER FEBRUARY 24

As we approach the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion in February, let us continue to intentionally engage in local relationships with Ukrainian and Slavic Churches; to encourage every Canadian church to bring Ukrainians and their stories into their churches with focused prayer; and to invite denominations and prayer networks to support Ukrainian civic organizations and carry prayers into public gatherings on February 24.

## 6. HOPE FOR RECONCILIATION

While for many today the wounds—seen and unseen—are simply too raw to contemplate reconciliation, it is imperative that we never lose sight of the long-term process involved and the ultimate hope for peace. The aggression and destruction need to stop. The killing of innocent people—including children—needs to stop. Then we can begin to hope for just restitution. While no human court can bring justice as God does, we need the spiritual hope that comes from repentance, truth telling, empathic listening, making reparation, offering forgiveness, building trust, and making new promises. We acknowledge the courage of all those—especially citizens of the Russian Federation—who have spoken out against the war and are eager to work for peace.



We offer our prayers that the sufferings and innocent loss of life caused by this war will be brought to a swift end. We pray that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, will be with all those who are suffering, and with us, as we wait in hopeful expectation.

May truth and mercy meet. May justice and peace kiss (Psalm 85:10).

This pastoral statement has been prepared and is endorsed by The Canadian Council of Churches, The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, and the Peace and Reconciliation Network of the World Evangelical Alliance. Canadian church leaders have endorsed this Canadian pastoral statement as follows:



*The Rev. Dr. Das Sydney*

**The Rev. Dr. Das Sydney**  
President  
THE CANADIAN COUNCIL OF  
CHURCHES

*Dr. David Guretzki*

**Dr. David Guretzki**  
President & Resident Theologian  
THE EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP  
OF CANADA

*Rev. Joel B. Zantingh*

**Rev. Joel B. Zantingh**  
Canadian Coordinator  
PEACE & RECONCILIATION  
NETWORK

*Rev. Bill Allan*

**Rev. Bill Allan**  
President  
ASSOCIATED GOSPEL CHURCHES  
OF CANADA

*Pastor David Annoh*

**Pastor David Annoh**  
New Life Church  
KING CITY, ON

*Terence Borisenko*

**Terence Borisenko**  
President  
THE UNION OF SLAVIC  
CHURCHES OF EVANGELICAL  
CHRISTIANS AND SLAVIC  
BAPTISTS OF CANADA

*Celia Polster Cheatley*

**Celia Polster Cheatley**  
Presiding Clerk  
CANADIAN YEARLY MEETING OF  
THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF  
FRIENDS (QUAKERS)

*Rev. Dr. Stephen Elliott*

**Rev. Dr. Stephen Elliott**  
National Superintendent  
THE WESLEYAN CHURCH OF  
CANADA

*L.K.(Rev. Fr.) Messale Engeda*

**L.K.(Rev. Fr.) Messale Engeda**  
Head Priest and Administrator  
ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX  
TEWAHEDO CHURCH OF CANADA



*Dr. Abraham Mar Paulos  
Episcopa*

**Dr. Abraham Mar Paulos Episcopa**  
Diocesan Bishop  
DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA OF  
THE MAR THOMA CHURCH

*Rev. Ken Esau*

**Rev. Ken Esau**  
National Faith and Life Director  
CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF  
MENNONITE BRETHREN  
CHURCHES

*Dr. Ian Fitzpatrick*

**Dr. Ian Fitzpatrick**  
National Director  
CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE  
CANADA

*Rev. Dr. Cliff Fletcher*

**Rev. Dr. Cliff Fletcher**  
Bishop  
THE FREE METHODIST CHURCH  
IN CANADA

*The Rev. Mary Fontaine*

**The Rev. Mary Fontaine**  
Moderator of the 148th General  
Assembly  
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN  
CANADA

*Rev. Leanne Friesen*

**Rev. Leanne Friesen**  
Executive Minister  
CANADIAN BAPTISTS OF  
ONTARIO AND QUEBEC

*Rev. William Hall*

**Rev. William Hall**  
President  
GRACE COMMUNION  
INTERNATIONAL CANADA

*The Right Rev Dr Carmen  
Lansdowne*

**The Right Rev Dr Carmen  
Lansdowne**  
Moderator  
THE UNITED CHURCH OF  
CANADA

*The Most Reverend  
Lawrence Huculak*

**The Most Reverend Lawrence  
Huculak**  
Metropolitan Archbishop of  
Winnipeg  
UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH  
IN CANADA

*Pastor Yuriy Iordakiev*

**Pastor Yuriy Iordakiev**  
The River Church  
TORONTO, ON

*The Most Reverend Jose  
Mark John Jamili*

**The Most Reverend Jose Mark  
John Jamili**  
Bishop  
APOSTOLIC CATHOLIC CHURCH  
OF CANADA

*Pastor Peter Jaruzczic*

**Pastor Peter Jaruzczic**  
Grace Church  
OSHAWA, ON



*The Rev. Susan C. Johnson*

**The Rev. Susan C. Johnson**  
National Bishop  
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN  
CHURCH IN CANADA

*Pastor Daniel Kalinovskiy*

**Pastor Daniel Kalinovskiy**  
New Life Church  
KING CITY, ON

*The Rev. John Kapteyn*

**The Rev. John Kapteyn**  
Executive Secretary  
THE REGIONAL SYNOD OF  
CANADA, REFORMED CHURCH IN  
AMERICA

*Rev. Dave Kelsey*

**Rev. Dave Kelsey**  
General Secretary  
INDEPENDENT ASSEMBLIES OF  
GOD, INTERNATIONAL | CANADA

*Rev. Doug Klassen*

**Rev. Doug Klassen**  
Executive Minister  
MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA

*Rev. Jason Krueger*

**Rev. Jason Krueger**  
Interim National Director  
CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF  
MENNONITE BRETHREN  
CHURCHES

*The Right Rev. Brian  
Magnus*

**The Right Rev. Brian Magnus**  
Bishop  
THE UNITED BRETHREN CHURCH  
IN CANADA

*Pastor Victor Maksimishin*

**Pastor Victor Maksimishin**  
Ukrainian Pentecostal Church  
ETOBICOKE, ON

*Rev. Charlie Mashinter*

**Rev. Charlie Mashinter**  
Executive Director  
BE IN CHRIST CHURCH OF  
CANADA

*The Most Rev. William  
T. McGrattan*

**The Most Rev. William T.  
McGrattan**  
Bishop of Calgary and  
President of  
THE CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF  
CATHOLIC BISHOPS

*Rev. Wesley Mills, MCL*

**Rev. Wesley Mills, MCL**  
President  
APOSTOLIC CHURCH OF  
PENTECOST

*Pastor Emmanuel  
Mukendy*

**Pastor Emmanuel Mukendy**  
Church of Eternal Word  
TORONTO, ON



*Pastor Valerij Narivonchik*

**Pastor Valerij Narivonchik**  
Power of the Cross Church  
TORONTO, ON

*The Most Rev. Linda Nicholls*

**The Most Rev. Linda Nicholls**  
Archbishop and Primate  
THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF  
CANADA

*The Rev. Jean-Daniel O'Donnada*

**The Rev. Jean-Daniel O'Donnada**  
National Pastor  
CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES  
OF CHRIST) IN CANADA

*Rev. Rob Ogilvie*

**Rev. Rob Ogilvie**  
Executive Minister  
CANADIAN BAPTISTS OF  
WESTERN CANADA

*Rev. Dr. David Schrader*

**Rev. Dr. David Schrader**  
National Pastor  
CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN  
CHURCHES IN CANADA

*Yehuda Silverman*

**Yehuda Silverman**  
Peace Program Coordinator  
CANADIAN FRIENDS SERVICE  
COMMITTEE (QUAKERS)

*His Eminence Archbishop  
Metropolitan Sotirios*

**His Eminence Archbishop  
Metropolitan Sotirios**  
GREEK ORTHODOX  
ARCHDIOCESE OF CANADA

*Rev. Cam Stuart*

**Rev. Cam Stuart**  
National Director (Appointee)  
CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF  
MENNONITE BRETHERN  
CHURCHES

*Rev. William Taylor*

**Rev. William Taylor**  
Executive Director  
EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH OF  
CANADA

*Rev. David Wells, M.A.*

**Rev. David Wells, M.A.**  
General Superintendent  
PENTECOSTAL ASSEMBLIES OF  
CANADA

*Pastor Andriy Zolotaryov*

**Pastor Andriy Zolotaryov**  
Ukrainian Bible Church  
ABBOTSFORD, BC

*Rev. Steve Falkiner*

**Rev. Steve Falkiner**  
President  
FOURSQUARE GOSPEL CHURCH  
OF CANADA





[www.councilofchurches.ca](http://www.councilofchurches.ca)

47 Queen's Park Crescent East  
Toronto, ON M5S 2C3  
(416)972-9494  
info@councilofchurches.ca



[www.evangelicalfellowship.ca](http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca)

275 Slater Street, Suite 810  
Ottawa, ON K1P 5H9  
(613)233-9868  
ottawa@theEFC.ca



[www.reconciledworld.net](http://www.reconciledworld.net)

Peace and Reconciliation Network of the WEA  
c/o The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada  
10 Huntingdale Blvd  
Scarborough ON M1W2S5  
(905) 479-5885  
info@reconciled.world