

# day 365

2023 Partnership Update

*Regarding the war in Ukraine*



International Fellowship  
of Christians and Jews®



**Yael Eckstein**  
PRESIDENT & CEO

*My dearest friends,*

No one expected that, 365 days after Russian troops invaded Ukraine, there would still be a brutal war waging. Valentina, a local Fellowship staff member in Kyiv, recently shared with me, “For the past 12 months, Russian rockets and bombs have been destroying and wiping out the peaceful cities and villages of Ukraine. Tens of thousands of civilians — children, women, and elderly — have already been brutally killed, mortally wounded, and tortured by Russian soldiers. The generation of elderly people who survived the Holocaust and are still alive these days, are now living through another round of the horror of war, if they have not yet died at the hands of a Russian soldier.”

Amidst this great evil, you, as our partners, have not forgotten or abandoned the Ukrainian people. Because of you, The Fellowship has been able to implement the largest and most comprehensive emergency response in our 40-year history. You have been G-d's light to the Jews we serve. Your love, faith, and hope have touched them when they needed you most.

I wish I could tell you this pain and suffering is over, or even coming to an end. But right now, it appears to be ramping up again. This Partnership Update tells stories of people you have saved, and allows you to see the challenges we still face as this war drags on into its second year. However, we wouldn't have made it this far without you. On behalf of all you have helped, and countless others, I thank G-d for you every day.

*With blessings from the Holy Land,*

*Yael Eckstein*

***You, LORD, keep my  
lamp burning; my God  
turns my darkness  
into light.***

PSALM 18:28



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*Cover photo: As the bombings started in Mariupol, a frightened young family huddled in their basement for safety.*



## Shining a light in the darkness

*When Esther was born in Ukraine in 1931, she was given two names. Her family privately called her Esther, but everyone else knew her as “Esfir” because an obviously Jewish name would only invite more persecution.*

A few years later, a neighbor overheard Esther’s father speak Yiddish, so he was labeled “an enemy of the people” and thrown into a prison camp. Not only did this rob the family of their main income earner, but the stigma “enemy of the people” was also applied to the family, robbing them of many rights and freedoms. Esther explained, “As soon as this label appeared in my personal file, it put an end to everything — dreams of a better life, my choice of education and profession, even my freedom to choose my work and place of residence.”

And when World War II started, the label had further consequences. Esther and her mother were among the last to be evacuated when the Germans came, narrowly escaping. By this time, “there were no more cars, only horses remained. We traveled on carts with horses for 75 miles to the railway. Then we went by train to Kazakhstan. This was two months of horror and suffering. We were always sick and hungry.”

When the war ended and Esther and her mother returned home to Ukraine, they found their home had been bombed, and any Jew who had remained behind had been killed. “We went around to all the neighbors and all the people we had known, in the hope that someone had hid and survived. Nobody survived.”

Over the decades, life began to normalize, and the horror of war faded to bad dreams and memories. However, when the war began last year, Esther was once again flooded with fear for her life. “In early February, I was left alone under the bombardments. My children



[in Israel and Spain] and I could only call each other. When I was hiding in the shelters from the bombs, I thought that I would not survive this second war, that I would die alone in that basement shelter. My heart skipped and my blood pressure rose just from the thought that the phone could run out of battery, and I would not be able to say goodbye to my children before I died. At that moment, I realized that I really wanted to live. I wanted to live with my son in Israel. I wanted to see my grandchildren.”

Because of you, her wish came true. Not long after that epiphany in the basement, Esther was connected to The Fellowship and our partners on the

ground. We helped her evacuate and airlifted her to Israel. “I had to be carried in the arms of volunteers onto one of the special rescue flights organized by The Fellowship. I remember with tears in my eyes and with great tenderness in my heart the boys and girls from The Fellowship who helped us along the way. I am so grateful for them — I want to hug them all. They shared their kindness, care and mercy with me.”

During Hanukkah in December, Esther, with her son in Israel, was able to celebrate the festival of lights. It was especially meaningful, having been saved from the darkness of her Ukraine basement.

*Last year, you gave*  
**\$28 million,**  
*participating in the largest and most  
comprehensive emergency response  
in The Fellowship's 40-year history.*

As bombs began to rain down on Ukraine,  
The Fellowship implemented emergency plans  
to keep people protected.

When it became obvious that the situation  
was worse than anticipated, Yael summoned  
the heads of other non-profits to develop  
a coordinated plan to provide provisions for refugees  
streaming out of the country.

**Because of you, we didn't stop there.**



## SECURITY EVACUATION

As people began to flee in February,  
The Fellowship coordinated all the refugee  
programs in Moldova and worked with  
partners to help those still in Ukraine.  
We continue to minister in both of these  
countries, and others, bordering Ukraine.



**80,000 displaced persons  
and refugees were given  
necessities and temporary  
housing in Ukraine and  
neighboring countries**

**54 elderly with severe  
medical conditions were  
evacuated on five special  
medical rescue flights**



## MEDICAL EVACUATION FLIGHTS

By April, it became obvious that many elderly  
Ukrainians were trapped even though they  
were desperate to leave. Using a network of  
ambulances and medically-equipped planes,  
we evacuated them to hospitals in Israel.



### HUMANITARIAN AID

Although airspace over Moldova was shut down in March, The Fellowship was given special permission to fly in aid and fly out Ukrainian Jews. The aid was distributed to our refugee programs in Moldova and taken into Ukraine.



**7 planes carried 95 tons of humanitarian aid to refugees and stranded Ukrainians, and then returned with Jews escaping to Israel**

### EMERGENCY ALIYAH

Because their homes had been destroyed and their lives were in danger, many Ukrainian Jews decided to begin new lives in the Holy Land. We continue to assist those relocating and provide support once they are in Israel.



**4,819 Ukrainians escaped to Israel with The Fellowship**

*We continue to stand with Ukrainian Jews in their time of greatest need!*

**Over 30,000 blankets and sleeping bags have been provided to Ukrainians in need of temporary housing**



### WINTER WARMTH

When the Russian army began strategically targeting the power grid in November, The Fellowship launched a campaign to keep Ukrainians warm. We are distributing gas stoves, heaters, candles, lanterns, LED lamps, generators, power banks, batteries, and much more.

**10 tons of *matzah* were distributed to Ukrainians for Passover, and we hosted seders in Moldova and Ukraine**



### HOLIDAY AID

Since not everyone could leave Ukraine, we sent holiday aid during Passover (April), the High Holy Days (September), and Hanukkah (December). God's children who are left in Ukraine will not be abandoned by us.

# History Repeats

*In 1941, the manager of the Zhytomyr Jewish orphanage knew she was running out of time to save all the children before the Nazis knocked down her door.*

Many years later, her daughter, 84-year-old Holocaust survivor Tzilia (below), told us the harrowing story. "World War II began when I turned three, and my whole life changed. My father was called up to the army on the first day of the war. My grandfather joined the partisans in order to fight the Germans. I stayed with my mother. She was the manager of a Jewish orphanage in Zhytomyr."

"She understood the danger for Jewish children, and she organized an evacuation on the third day of the war to save all the orphans. My mother cared for all the orphans as if they were her biological children. We all headed to the Urals in northern Russia. The last part of the evacuation journey was on a ship. Kindergarten-age children were placed on the bottom deck of the boat, elementary school children on the middle deck, and the older children stayed on the open deck. I was the smallest child on the ship, and my mother asked the older children to look after me while she was working. Suddenly the German

planes were over us, and one of the bombs hit the side of the ship. The lower deck with the kindergarten children was flooded with water, and none of them survived." For the rest of her life, Tzilia's mother mourned the loss of those orphans.

## NEVER AGAIN...AGAIN

A year ago, when the Russian army invaded Ukraine, that same orphanage in Zhytomyr was once again in danger. As bombs were landing in Ukraine, The Fellowship activated our emergency plans and began evacuations. The children had to hurriedly gather their most precious possessions and leave. One young girl, Hani (right), almost forgot her stuffed monkey, Chuchu, and ran back to get him. For two difficult weeks, Hani and the other children were on the run trying to find a way out of the country. After many detours and roadblocks, they finally made it through the Carpathian Mountains into Romania. On March 6, 2022, we put them on a flight for Israel.

The staff, children of the orphanage, and other community members who joined them on the journey temporarily settled in Nes Harim, a community in central Israel while a more permanent home was being prepared in Ashkelon. Hani has settled in wonderfully. When our staff visited her recently, she told us, "I love Israel and I am very happy to be here in Nes Harim. I have a comfortable room with my three best friends. We always keep the room tidy and do everything together. Chuchu is also here with me."

Rabbi Wilhelm, the leader of the Zhytomyr community who helped lead the children to safety, realizes that the children may not stay in Israel permanently. Some have completed the *aliyah* process (legal immigration to Israel), but some of the children in the community have parents back in Ukraine. "We're currently expecting that we'll be in Israel for at least the next year. We don't know what will happen in Ukraine. Even if there is a ceasefire,



*"My mother never recovered from being unable to save all the children from the Zhytomyr orphanage during the evacuation in 1941. I think that she is smiling from heaven knowing about The Fellowship's assistance to successfully evacuate all Jewish Zhytomyr orphans to Israel from the war in Ukraine in 2022."*

*“We had to leave within two hours, it was too dangerous to stay in Zhytomyr. As I was leaving, I realized that I had forgotten Chuchu, my favorite toy monkey. I ran back inside to grab Chuchu and held him the entire way.”*







*The orphans from Zhytomyr escaped from Ukraine on buses, and then flew to the safety of a new community in Israel.*

the situation is not completely stable, and it is scary to return. The future of the orphanage is in Ukraine, and it makes sense to return when the war stops, but these are children who need stability. We cannot return when the country is in a state of war.”

The community finally moved to Ashkelon before the beginning of the Israeli school year, and the children were able to begin the school year in a new school. Rabbi Wilhelm said, “We will stay here for at least a year, so the children can begin the school year in a new school. Rabbi Wilhelm explained, “We will stay there for at least a year, as long as the war in Ukraine continues. Their home is in Ukraine, we are still here as guests. We simply don’t know what will happen next in Ukraine nor how long it will last.”

The manager of the orphanage, Malka Bukiet, added, “Currently, the most important thing for the children is to have stability and daily routine, and they have it here.”

But the trauma of war lingers. Malka also let us know that the children are following the news from Ukraine. It is especially difficult for the kids who still have family there. They ask questions and get anxious when they hear about attacks in the cities where their relatives live.

#### **BUT THIS TIME IT’S DIFFERENT**

Tzilia understands their fear and concern. She grew up in the midst of war. And her mother raised her on stories of friends and family lost in the war — even after they returned to their home in Ukraine.

In 1997, Tzilia and her mother made *aliyah* from Ukraine. She told us, “I am

happy that my mother, in her old age, finally came to the land of our ancestors. She died twenty years ago, but never recovered from being unable to save all the children from the Zhytomyr orphanage during the evacuation in 1941. I think that she is smiling from heaven knowing about The Fellowship’s assistance to successfully evacuate all Jewish Zhytomyr orphans to Israel from the war in Ukraine in 2022.”

As someone who listened to God’s leading when praying about the situation in Ukraine, you are the reason we were able to get these children out so quickly and efficiently. You invested prophetically in the mission of The Fellowship, and God used your gifts to ensure that these children did not meet the same fate as the orphans in 1941. We are so grateful for you!





1,600  
children

and staff were evacuated  
from Ukrainian children's  
homes and orphanages

*In October of last year, Yael  
(above left) and The Fellowship's  
Board of Directors visited the  
Zhytomyr orphans to check  
on their progress in Israel.*



## *Update on the Tikva orphans*

In the early days of the war, the orphans of Zhytomyr were not the only ones who desperately needed to be evacuated. Over 1,000 children and community members also fled Odesa to reach the safety of Romania. Once there, the staff housed the orphans in specially assigned areas, built a school, and even opened a health clinic. However, they primarily focused their efforts on establishing much-needed stability and routine for the orphans. They bought them new clothes and toys because everything had been left behind in Ukraine, brought in a team of professionals to address the trauma the children experienced, and have worked diligently to foster a sense of normalcy. The orphans continue to be showered with love and are flourishing amongst the rest of the community.







## The aggression is escalating again

*Our staff member in Kyiv, Valentina, summed up the haunting experience of living in the midst of a war by saying, “This war has taken everything from us — our lives, our minds, and our tranquility. It has exposed every single cell in our bodies and souls to the struggle of making it possible just to live through another day. The days, weeks, and months that have followed one another since February 24 (2022) bring mostly bad news.”*

In response to the overwhelming need, Valentina and the rest of our staff (on the ground in Ukraine, as well as in our Israeli, American, and Canadian offices) have been working around the clock to make sure everyone who can leave is put on an *aliyah* flight, and those who cannot leave (like Nathan’s story on the next page), are supplied with every basic necessity to stay warm and fed. Valentina continued, “We knew that in this terrible atmosphere, we needed to stay strong for these people, trying to create some order and safety.”

However, the Russian army is not easing their war of aggression. Beginning on November 23, 2022, the cities of Kyiv, Odesa, Kharkov, Lvov, Chernigov, and many other regions of Ukraine, were strategically left without sources of energy when the Russian army launched a massive shelling across the country. As a result of these spates of attack, they have succeeded in hitting important infrastructure facilities, and causing serious damage to the power, heat, and water supply systems of the capital and other cities. Many people believe this is a deliberate strategy to strip civilians of their humanity and undermine their determination to fight for their country.



An elderly woman sits in the dark during a bombing of her city.



# Increased bombings are decimating the power grid

*On February 10, 2023, a fresh round of Russian attacks (using Iranian-made drones) took out energy facilities in eastern, southern, and western Ukraine even though much of the Ukrainian population was already without light, water, and heat. This situation has brought another wave of disease and suffering, especially for the small children and the elderly. The temperature this winter has plummeted below zero degrees and the elderly (who are particularly vulnerable to colder temperatures) are freezing in their beds at night. Children are doing their homework by candlelight because there is no electricity. Civilians live with the constant fear of having their houses being destroyed and being left out in the cold with nowhere to go.*

Valentina and the rest of our staff are determined to address this suffering: “Today, as Russia continues to send their missiles across the territory of Ukraine, taking the lives of mothers, fathers, newborns, and even unborn long-awaited children, destroying our residential and maternity hospitals, kindergartens, and schools, destroying over and over again the energy system of Ukraine, the country’s heat supply and water supply system, we at The Fellowship continue to provide the maximum possible assistance. We remain loyal to the main goal of bringing hope and light to the world.”

As you pray for Valentina, other staff members, and the Ukrainian Jewish population, will you consider continuing the fight with us?

Bombing raids continue to destroy homes, forcing more and more people out into the cold.

## Elderly Jews are more vulnerable this winter!

Due to the aging process and underlying medical issues, adults over 75 can develop hypothermia faster than younger people. When the temperature plummets to 0 degrees, frostbite can happen in mere minutes. Cold weather increases the risk of heart attacks and pneumonia in the elderly.

Several cities in Ukraine have had their central heating stations attacked, making this winter very high risk.



Winter in Ukraine is like winter in our north central states.





## *Your faithfulness provides hope in the dark*

*Nathan, an 84-year-old Holocaust survivor, freezes in his bed at night because there's no electricity.*

Nathan is bed-bound and has been blind since birth. He still remembers holding his mother in his arms as she slowly died at the hands of the Nazis when he was only five years old. Today, Nathan is living in a caring, Jewish old-age home in Odesa, Ukraine, but because of the recent catastrophic damage to the infrastructure, he struggles to stay warm. When our volunteers delivered this precious survivor a warm Fellowship blanket to cover him during bitter cold nights, he cried out, saying, "Shalom, shalom, thank you!" However, because of you, we were able to give him even more. We installed a generator that not only kept Nathan warm, but also warmed his entire senior residence home and everyone living there. Together, we can make sure that other elderly Ukrainians like Nathan have everything they need, whether it be gas stoves, heaters, sleeping bags, blankets, generators, utility supplements, interim housing, warming hubs, food packages, hot meals, or medicine.





# \$1.8 million

is critically needed  
to keep Ukrainians alive  
and warm this winter



## *Fleeing again, but for the last time*

*“On February 24, at 4am, the doorbell rang,” 82-year-old Svetlana told us when we came to drop off a bag of supplies. “My son came running to me and yelled, ‘War!’”*

My heart stopped. You have no idea what a terrible world-destroying word it is. My son helped me pack a bag with some possessions and documents. We literally ran to the basement of a house being built nearby.

“There were already so many people there that there was no place to sit — not even on the floor. There were frightened children, confused and helpless adults, and elderly people with horror in their eyes. My son brought me a chair and we took turns sleeping that night on a chair. Tanks were moving through the city. Planes bombed the city.

“After two of the longest and most terrible weeks of my life, we got a call from the synagogue and were told that there was an evacuation bus. We had to come to the synagogue within an hour. We had a glimmer of hope. When we got on the bus, we put our fate in G-d’s hands and prayed and prayed for his mercy.”

Like the many other elderly Holocaust survivors in Ukraine, this frantic evacuation evoked remembrances of running for their lives in childhood. Svetlana was an infant when the Nazis invaded her city, and many of her extended family were killed during the mass genocide at Babi Yar. However, because her mother worked for a military factory, they had already evacuated. Svetlana’s earliest memories are of going to bed hungry and never being able to stay warm as they moved from place to place to stay ahead of the Nazis.

However, because of you, Svetlana’s evacuation was starkly different this time. When she arrived at our center for refugees in Moldova, Svetlana was fed, given a warm place to stay, and even had the simple luxury of a hot shower. “All we had were the clothes on our backs but The Fellowship gave us clothes, shoes, personal hygiene products, and medicines. They invited a doctor to

examine me. The panic in my eyes was replaced by tears of relief.”

On March 15, Svetlana was put on one of our special rescue flights. “What an amazing thing The Fellowship did when they organized charter flights from Kishinev to Israel and got us out of the bombing!” Svetlana exclaimed. “I arrived in Israel with only a small suitcase. My whole life was left behind in Ukraine. Now, The Fellowship keeps supporting me in Israel. I receive monthly gift cards that enable me to buy groceries in the supermarket. If not for The Fellowship, I probably would not survive.”

Svetlana is now a part of our *With Dignity and Fellowship* program, and so we are committed to ensuring she is fed and loved for the rest of her life. We could not do this without you. You shared God’s light in Svetlana’s darkest moments, and now she’s finally safe — she won’t have to run again.

*“I arrived in Israel with only a small suitcase. My whole life was left behind in Ukraine. Now, The Fellowship keeps supporting me in Israel.”*







**Bishop Paul Lanier,**  
BOARD CHAIR, THE FELLOWSHIP

*My dear friends,*

I was at the Ukrainian border last March, and then in Odesa just a few weeks ago. Two things hadn't changed in all that time of rubble and ruin: the ongoing violence and suffering of war, and your faithful healing presence. What does that look like? How did you heal Ukrainians?

It was a knock at the door with a box of food that kept a family going for a few more days. It was generators that were the only source of light and warmth against the brutal weaponized winter. You bought airline tickets that allowed refugees to leave behind the sirens and smoke that had haunted and taunted them for months.

Was God there? Yes, He was there, and He wasn't silent. He was in the blanket you gave to a trembling soul. He was in the medicines that saved a child's life. People felt Him in the gentle touch of Fellowship-family hands.

Yet it is not enough. These days it's never enough. If there are bullets and bombs, then there is pain and suffering, hunger, and heartache. But as strange as it might sound, your International Fellowship of Christians and Jews shines brightest in the worst of times. And you and I need each other right now.

You need us to go where you can't go, and we need you to help us get there as only you can. Together, we are faithful. Together, we will do everything we can to bring God's light of healing, help, and hope. I thank you.

*Together in hope,*

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul Lanier".

As we begin the second year of war in Ukraine, please join the faithful Christians who are continuing to share the light of God to suffering Ukrainian Jews.





International Fellowship  
of Christians and Jews®

## *The Fellowship is a charity you can trust.*

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Contact your Philanthropy Advisor  
for more information.

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FRONT: AS THE BOMBINGS STARTED IN MARIUPOL, A FRIGHTENED YOUNG FAMILY HUDDLED IN THEIR BASEMENT FOR SAFETY.

BACK: AN 82-YEAR-OLD UKRAINIAN WOMAN RECEIVES A HOMECARE VISIT DURING THE WAR.