

Dear Friends,

This past week, the *Friends of Lithuania* gathered on zoom for a time to check in with our brothers and sisters in Lithuania during this tumultuous time of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Seeing the brutality of war is heartbreaking but seeing the resolve of the Ukrainian people and the global response gives us great hope. We know this war has a significant impact on Lithuania and all of the Baltics and Eastern Europe. We pray for peace to come and for the freedom of a sovereign country to remain. We are deeply concerned for our friends in Lithuania as well as all of Eastern Europe. Bishop Alsted sent a greeting to our group which was read during the zoom call:

A MESSAGE FROM BISHOP ALSTED:



Dear Friends of Lithuania. I greet you with words of hope and peace in these turbulent and challenging times. There is war in Europe since Russia on 24th February invaded Ukraine, a free and democratic country. In Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia as well as in the rest of the Nordic and Baltic area there is great anxiety and many questions about the future – we are asking each other, what's next, where will this end?

As you meet today, please know that in Ukraine, not far from Lithuania, missiles and grenades fly in the air, young men are fighting and dying, and families are hiding hoping to survive the madness and hoping to have a future in a free country. I have called the church to prayer and fasting – and we are preparing to receive the many refugees expected to come from Ukraine. – Please pray with us for Ukraine, for Russia and for wisdom and humble hearts for the leaders of the world. I have attached my pastoral letter to the church. This is a time of deep prayer for changed hearts, protection and peace. Lord have mercy upon us.

Christian Alsted, Bishop in the United Methodist Church, Nordic & Baltic Region

UPDATE FROM PASTOR REMIIGJUS ON THE INVASION OF UKRAINE:



We spent considerable time hearing from Remigijus and the impact this is having on Lithuania. Here are his comments:

So many things happening, so much information. You can feel and sense a high level of anxiety in Lithuania and all of the Baltic countries. Everyone thought that war would not happen. Prayers for our brothers and sister in Ukraine, the Methodist Church in Ukraine, the pastors and all the people. There are refugees coming into Poland and Romania and starting to come to Lithuania. We are prepared to welcome them and provide a safe haven. The Lithuania government is making places ready for refugees. Individuals, businesses, churches, and others are as well. There is a campus (resort) for wealthy people in Lithuania and all business has stopped there and they are preparing the campus for refugees.

The Lithuanian people stand with Ukraine. It is a difficult time as many Lithuanian people have friends and family who live in Ukraine and they are worried about them. Remigijus shared about his friend who is Ukrainian but right now lives in Lithuania. He will go back to fight for his country and for freedom. Remigijus described the resolve he saw in his eyes last Sunday when he announced he is going back to Ukraine to fight for freedom. It is difficult because he cannot cross back into Ukraine in some areas because of Russian control.

The Lithuanian government is supporting Ukraine financially. There is word they will send 5 million euros to help. Individual and businesses are collecting money and have raised over 3 million euros in 72 hours. There are 30 trucks filled with donated items (clothing, blankets, etc.) to take to Ukraine. There is such an outpouring of support. They have more to give but need to get the trucks unloaded where refugees are located so they can refill the trucks again.

What will the Methodist Church do? Bishop Alsted called a meeting with the District Superintendent's from the affected countries to work on a plan so they can respond quickly. The church is looking at each location, each country, and how they can respond. Remigijus said that UMCOR (a program by Global Ministries that provides relief during a crisis) is the best place to give right now as they have relationships built and will get the funds to where they are needed. Also, the church will work with Red Cross so support their work.

Remigijus said the Lithuanian Methodist Church is preparing to have all property owned by the church to use for housing refugees. Remigijus called us to pray and called us to action.

Our group asked the question – What can we do to help? Remigijus responded:

1. Giving directly to UMCOR will ensure the funds will go directly to where they are needed.
2. Offerings from the churches in Lithuania will be used to help pay for food and other necessities for refugee families. If additional funds are needed as time goes on, Remigijus will let us know.
3. As Christians, we are called to pray.

TIME OF PRAYER LED BY PASTOR DALE CLEM:

Dale Clem led our discussion and explained that in our time together in 2022, we hope to share more with each other by encouraging conversation. This meeting we want to share what God is calling us to pray for, to share what is on our hearts. He described the cycle of prayer.

- It starts with God. God takes the initiative. God created the heavens, the earth, the universe. God has taken the first step.
- God also takes the first step in speaking to us. He comes to us and puts something on our hearts. We frequently hear people saying, "God put something on my heart."
- We then give back to God what he has put in our hearts by praying or taking action. The cycle of prayer.



Dale invited us into a time of silence, to listen to how God is speaking to our hearts. We then had a discussion where people shared what God had placed on their hearts.

Dale shared he is taking a poetry class and read the following poem written in response to the war on Ukraine.

Russia Invades Ukraine

Small minded national self-interests
conquest, families oppressed
evil, unrest, protests.

Decades building
Black Sea Industry
communication, TV,
homes and highways
destroyed in days.

Prayers for peace:
"God, we entreat
make them retreat"
feels so incomplete,
and despairing rather than taking
responsibility for making
peace possible in the present
Peaceable kingdom.

We must coach ourselves
to remember that Wisdom
surpasses our wisdom.
Patiently pray "Thy Kingdom Come,"
believe beyond history, it brings shalom.

Raise a shield against evil trying
to take away beauty and goodness.
Cling to the dignity of justice.
Guard your heart from anger, revenge, hate,
those deceptive states.

Patiently practice peaceful habits;
kindness, protest, charity, grace.
Dream, sing, hygiene; befriend a new face.
Care for animals, plants and birds,
undergirds our spiritual defense against the absurd.
And when we forget, for we surely will,
let earth remind us through goodwill,
sunrises, songbirds, and beautiful hills.

MUSIC:

Darius Kudirka, musician for Kaunas UMC, shared his gift of music by playing “Sweet Hour of Prayer” sung in Lithuanian. It was a sacred time as we reflected on our discussion about prayer.

HOLY LAND TRIP:

Dale shared he is leading a trip to the Holy Land in November 2022. It is a unique opportunity not only to see holy sites but to visit with people who live in there, and visit ministries such as the Bethlehem College, the Barma hospital and Center for disabled children on the Mount of Olives. Pastor Remigijus and several other Lithuanians will join this trip as well as Jeanie and Dennis Reimer. We hope others will consider joining us. See attached brochure for more information or email Dale if you have questions. dale.clem@umcna.org

NEXT FRIENDS OF LITHUANIA ZOOM GATHERING:

We are planning for quarterly meetings so we will gather again in May/June of 2022. Please watch for emails about our next meeting.

A special thanks to Egle for translating and for Remigijus, Dale and Darius for leading our time together. Remigijus and Wannell Scott closed us in a beautiful prayer.

Blessings,

Jeanie

Jeanie Kurka Reimer

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Here is a list of those that participated. If I missed anyone, please let me know. We were happy to have all who participated:

Lithuania participants:

Rev. Remigijus Matulaitis – District Superintendent, Lithuania UMC

Egle Juskiene – Translator/staff member DS Office

Algina Kairiene – Šiauliai Methodist Church

Darius Kudirka – Kaunas UMC

Kristina Matulaitiene – Kaunas UMC

Sweden participants:

Rev. Walla Carlson – Pastor for Panevėžys UMC

Maria Bergkvist – Uniting Church in Sweden (volunteer for Birzai and Pagalbos Centras)

United States participants:

Tim Binkley – FUMC, Lancaster Ohio

Ann Brown – Royal Oak UMC, Royal Oak, MI

Melissa Borth – FUMC Neenah, WI

Jane & Bill Clarke, FUMC Charlottesville, VA

Rev. Dale Clem - Retired pastor and past missionary in Lithuania serving Siauliai, Taurage & Panevezys (2000 – 2003) Royal Oak UMC

Julie Croft – Grapevine UMC, Grapevine, TX & Friends of Latvia representative

Rev. Dr. JD Landis – retired Methodist pastor. Serves on the board of trustees for Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary

Rev. Alex Joyner – Pastor, FUMC Charlottesville, VA

Jeanie Reimer – Partnership Coordinator for Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, GBGM. Member, FUMC Neenah, WI

Robin Richardson – Royal Oak UMC, Royal Oak, MI

Kitty & Dan Stapleton – Centreville UMC, VA

Wannell Scott – Friends of Latvia representative

Rev. Erin Totten – Past Global Ministries Fellow in Lithuania; presently serving Bartonville UMC and Kingston Mines UMC, IL