



Toretsk

Being within 4 miles of the front line, the sounds of war are ever present. The residents say they no longer notice, but our team was very aware – if not rattled – by every deep thud. With a currently surviving population of 18,000, Toretsk was a thriving city of 100,000 before Russia’s first occupation of the Donesk and Luhansk oblasts (regions) in 2014. But more than the sounds, it is the signs of war that draw one to a place of deep emotions ... sorrow, anger. But also compassion. And through the relentless faithfulness of our partners from Tal’ne – Volodymyr (Vova) and Andrej – we are bringing love, compassion, and hope to those still living here. Since the war began, they have been making weekly 27-hour (800 mile) round trips to bring food, medicine, and the hope of Christ to Ukrainians living, and soldiers serving, near the front lines of the war. When we join them, we come with a van full of aid purchased with the generous and faithful gifts of our supporters. This aid serves to “re-stock” the garage they use to store the food and medicine that gets boxed into individual care packages prior to each trip. The packaging work lovingly carried out each week by members of the churches in Tal’ne.

At dusk we loaded 100 pre-prepared aid boxes (2,000 lbs) into the van we brought from Bratislava, and an equal amount into the van that Vova and Andrej use themselves. But the load was not yet complete. Before our departure to Toretsk we added a load of homemade Ukrainian food (borscht, salads, varenyky, pelmeni) prepared by the women of a nearby village, and 200 loaves of bread – baked fresh that day at home by a local pastor and his family. The love and compassion poured out FROM Ukrainians TO Ukrainians is unimaginable.



After a 9-hour drive, we arrived and shared tea and bread with Vladimir – an elder from a local church in Toretsk. Their recently (2021) completed church building had been destroyed in April of last year, with 18 brave Ukrainian soldiers losing their lives as they sheltered there when war advanced on the city. Those from the church who have remained in the city now meet in the home of a church member who has migrated to the west. Vladimir was the “dispatcher”, making phone calls to church members in different areas of the city who would spread the word of our planned arrival time and location to their neighbors. And like clockwork, those in need would already be gathered as we pulled in with both vans at each location. Different people shared short messages of hope from the Gospel (Nastiiia translating for Gary when he did), and Andrej’s guitar and everyone’s singing brought moments of praise and worship that broke the atmosphere of fear and despair – the sounds and signs of war still remaining as a backdrop. Then the “bread of the earth”, now bathed in a message of the “bread of life”, was distributed to all who came. We don’t know why the Lord opened up this door for us to serve in this way. We only know that we are deeply grateful He invited us, and deeply grateful you continue to faithfully support this work with your prayers and your financial gifts. Thank you!

Gary Joy

Gary & Joy Peiss

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