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Pray for Kyiv

Natasha Seleznova has served ITEM as a translator in Kyiv, Ukraine for years. Rev. Alister Torrens, an ITEM missionary, is the president of the Evangelical Reformed Seminary of Ukraine.

Torrens left Kyiv in mid-February with his 9-year-old son to join his wife and daughter in Northern Ireland. His wife and daughter were already there because his daughter had surgery there in February.

As more than a million Ukrainians fled their homes, Seleznova stayed in her apartment in Kyiv with her husband. Her two grown children remained in the city, too; they stayed with friends. Seleznova and Torrens asked for prayer—for the war to end, for Russian President Vladimir Putin’s desires to be thwarted, for safety, for food and water to make it to people who need them. Donations to ITEM can be earmarked for Ukrainians. See below.

Seleznova and Torrens joined ITEM officials in the United States on a Zoom call on March 3. Highlights:

Seleznova: It’s hard to say how we are. We feel safe so far, even though we hear explosions almost every day, and we hear sirens. But so far, we are safe.

My sister didn’t sleep for a couple of nights. But then finally you get to that moment when you just drop dead, and you don’t hear anything. No sirens or anything.

In our area where we stay, it’s still quite often. We hear explosions, but I can tell they are distant. One night it was so strong that our windows were shaking. The very first night, when it first began, we woke up at 5 a.m., and it was so loud. At first I tried to understand what it was. Then we knew something serious was going on.

We must stay with the rest of Ukrainians. I know there are a lot of people who are fleeing—mostly families with small children. But not all of them were able to do so. So we have a lot of small children still staying in the most dangerous areas.

Even if we wanted to flee, to go to different parts of Ukraine—there is no absolutely safe part of Ukraine anymore. We feel safe at home, and we have a saying: In your own home, even the walls are helping you. In this situation, when you stay home, it’s just better, I guess ... well, there is nothing better at this point.

I went through this type of situation when we had to leave Donetsk (eight years ago). We left everything behind—our apartment, my husband’s business and so on and just came to Kyiv with nothing. We had only a couple of suitcases with clothes.

We had to find a place to stay. And at that time I was telling my girls, the Lord is teaching us, maybe, that we get too attached to the things in this world. We had our own apartment, and we felt so safe and stable. And life was going pretty well. And in one moment, everything changed.

We need to learn what the Lord is teaching us in all of that. He’s sovereign, and we believe in His providence. And so this is the second time it’s going on in my life. And I would say it’s easier for us than for those who just first faced this situation.

So far we’ve been able to go to the grocery store. We go through lots and lots of checkpoints to get there. You show your passport. There is a shortage of certain foods. This whole week, we were not able to buy bread. There is no meat. No milk or any dairy products. No vegetables. We have some food supplies. I don’t know how long they will last.

Torrens: Everybody understands that in a few days there may not be anything in the store. People will be hungry, but they also may not have anything to buy. So it’s hard to know what to do.

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Seleznova: The other day, my husband was out, and he met our neighbor, who was coming from the grocery store. And he said, “Oh I just got some bread.”

But of course it was gone within minutes. And he asked my husband if we had bread. And my husband said, “Well, we don’t. We ran out.” So he says, “Well, I can share. I can share with you what I got.” So people are caring about each other. And this helps.

And also one other thing. I was talking to some of my friends, Christians and students of our seminary. I was assuring them that there are a lot of Christians in the United States and Canada who are praying for them. And everyone is responding, that we really feel those prayers. We do feel it.

It’s something you cannot explain. Even though the situation is so crazy, you don’t know what will happen tomorrow. But you feel this protection — this invisible protection over you. I don’t know how to explain it. It’s also the testimony of some of the soldiers. So many are already testifying “I should have been killed in this situation, but somehow I was spared.”

Torrens: It frustrates me, incredibly, that people in the West still are prepared to believe anything that comes out of Putin’s mouth. Putin has been consistent for years—if he says anything about Ukraine, you can be sure that the opposite is true. And it’s incredibly vexing that anyone’s prepared to believe any word that comes out of his mouth in relation to Ukraine. The only way Ukraine is a threat to Russia is because it’s a successful democracy. He can’t have that. He can’t have a successful Ukraine that’s free.

Putin wants the Soviet Union 2.0. That’s his goal—a Ukrainian territory that’s entirely under his control, or that has completely failed so it’s not attractive to Russians.

I think acquiescing with falsehoods is tantamount to agreeing to them. This is a time when the church needs to speak out in favor of the weak.

You’ve had people praising Putin’s plan to invade Ukraine. I’m sure some people in some of the churches believe some of that stuff. As ministers of the gospel, we need to speak truth and speak against all slander and falsehoods.

So don’t believe a single word that comes from any Russian official regarding Ukraine. In fact, when I started to get worried most of all was when Putin started to explicitly deny he would invade Ukraine. That’s the time to get worried. I knew that probably meant that was exactly what he was going to do.

Seleznova: Concerning Russia targeting only military bases, that’s not true either. We know. We see the pictures. We see videos. They are shelling the apartment buildings.

It’s just a horror, what’s going right now. Many civilians are being killed. Children are being killed.

Prayer Requests

Please pray about these issues.

1. Pray for the Russian invasion of Ukraine to stop, for peace. That during this war crisis, for hearts to be turned to God, that people would hear, repent and believe the gospel.
2. Pray for ITEM’s interpreter, Natasha and her family still in Kyiv, for their safety and ability to get food and supplies.
3. Pray for the ERSU staff and students who are ministering to their congregations and neighbors both materially and spiritually.
4. Pray for healing of Saphira Torrens’ hand and foot, for the pain to go away.

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Contributions to ITEM in Canada may be sent to:

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To send money for Ukrainian relief efforts, mark the donation as “Ukraine relief.”