

# NEWS FROM OUR PARTNERS IN POLAND

| BY KATHY KIDD |

*Photography provided by Dr. Wojciech Szczerba and EWST*



SINCE 2006, WHITE MEMORIAL PRESBYTERIAN HAS PARTNERED WITH THE EVANGELICAL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY IN WROCLAW, POLAND TO SHARE EDUCATIONAL AND STUDY OPPORTUNITIES AND DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE ANOTHER. IN THE WINTER OF 2022, POLAND FOUND ITSELF LIVING NEXT DOOR TO A WAR AS RUSSIA INVADED UKRAINE. AS A SEMINARY, THEY HAD ALREADY ESTABLISHED MINISTRIES AND PARTNERSHIPS IN UKRAINE, SO THE CALL TO PROVIDE AID TO THEIR NEIGHBORS WAS A STRONG ONE. AS OUR ESTABLISHED FRIENDS AND PARTNERS, EST PROVIDED A WAY FOR US TO PROVIDE AID DIRECTLY TO REFUGEES WHO HAD BEEN DISPLACED BY THE WAR.

The Poland Ministry has been receiving periodic reports on the Ukrainian refugee situation from Dr. Wojciech Szczerba, the rector of EST. In July, Wojciech and his family, Magda, Tosia, and Tony visited Raleigh and gave a presentation about the Ukrainian refugee situation in Poland and the work that faculty, staff, and students of the seminary have been doing.

All members of the faculty and staff of EST have been involved in working with the refugees. In addition to counseling and language tutoring, they have assisted with obtaining work permits, housing, and other basic needs. The seminary has partnered with many Christian humanitarian agencies to assist with the resettlement. The absorption of 3.2 million refugees into Polish communities throughout Poland is truly a miracle and has been done without placing people into camps. On the following page is one of Wojciech's most current reports (Wroclaw May 18, 2022). >

Dear friends,

The situation of Ukrainian refugees in Poland is now much more stabilized than it was one or two months ago. Most of them are registered in government offices, which enables them to get social benefits and profit from other rights like medical insurance, work permit, access to public schools, and other legal possibilities. With the help of Polish hosts and volunteers, many Ukrainian refugees have already found work and live on their own. At Evangelical School of Theology, we may see the process of adjusting Ukrainians to Polish society by ourselves. Ukrainians who learn Polish at our courses and those whom we help with anything they need are more and more self-dependent, which is the best reward for our efforts. To make the process of Ukrainians' socialization as effective as possible, we closely cooperate with six churches/organizations in Poland. This assistance reaches thousands of people in need, mostly mothers with children. Below are the details concerning the specific activities.

Thanks to funds delivered through EST to the association **Genesis from Pabianice**, they could adapt a hotel into a Christian shelter for thirty refugees. They aim not only at providing shelter and meals but also to help them to become independent - to help them find jobs, schools, and kindergartens for their children, to help them integrate into the new culture, and to learn Polish. However, the main goal of their mission is Christian pastoral care. With this aim in view, they organized Alpha courses in Ukrainian, Polish and English classes as well as psychological help, which is financed by EST.



EST also delivered funds to the **Lutheran Center in Wroclaw**. The funds were used to renovate and furnish apartments for refugees - thirteen women with children. They also created a workplace for Ukrainians - currently, more than ten people work for the Lutheran Center in Wroclaw. Moreover, they provide any help that is needed on an ongoing basis, including organizing free Polish lessons, helping individuals with registering in a government office, and finding a place in schools and kindergartens for their children.



Furthermore, EST closely cooperates with the foundation **Proem from Zakoscielce**. The foundation transformed a Christian center into a shelter for refugees and they host as many as two hundred people. Their main activity is to bring people from the Ukrainian-Polish border and help them to get to France, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. They have already helped six hundred people to get abroad and find accommodation there. Nevertheless, they need finances to host Ukrainian residents in their center.



EST has also delivered funds to the foundation **Krzyzowa/Kreisau from Swidnica**. Thanks to the money, they were able to organize any help needed, which is accommodation, Polish courses, legal and psychological help as well as help with finding a job and a place in schools/kindergartens for one hundred Ukrainians residing in their center.



Apart from helping refugees in Poland, we help organize transports with medicine, food, and all needed stuff to Ukraine in cooperation with **The Rock church from Wroclaw**. Also, the cooperation resulted in the purchase of a medical device for the rehabilitation of soldiers and other patients, which was transported to a hospital in Ukraine. It was possible due to the funds delivered by EST. Moreover, we started a cooperation with the **Royal Rangers organization from Wroclaw**, which helps us in a shipment of two containers filled with approximately 30,000 clothes from the USA to Poland and then to Ukraine.

The above initiatives would not be possible if we had not been supported by our international friends. Thank you so much for your generosity, which has put so much positive impact on the lives of thousands of people in Poland and Ukraine. We feel blessed that we may be part of this beautiful manifestation of Christian love, which has united many Christian organizations and churches in Poland. Hopefully, the power of the Gospel will reach the wounded hearts of so many people. Thus, we ask you to help us continue bringing humanitarian aid to those who suffered from war.

The only major additional project was to transport a container of clothes from the American company Berne Apparel. The company shipped 40,000 new garments for people in need from Ukraine. The container has already arrived, and the clothes are being distributed among the refugees and will reach Ukraine.

Another action EST took was the collection of canned meat for the soldiers at the front. Just today, a transport left with a thousand canned goods from a friendly congregation in Wroclaw. Support in such a challenging situation as war is crucial to maintain hope and strength to defend the country and homes.

Yours in Christ,  
Wojciech and Marek

As a congregation we have sent over \$110,000 to EST to assist with refugee efforts. All of this humanitarian work has been done in addition to their usual teaching and community activities at the seminary. They are an educational institution guiding people to reach their intellectual, theological and spiritual potential. For many years, EST has organized a Festival of Protestant Culture and promoted ecumenical dialogue and cooperation within their city. They also prepare seminarians to serve local churches, and through their Academy of the Third Age help people explore spiritual and theological questions. Contributions for work with Ukrainians have been generous, but the seminary continues to incur operating expenses. WMPC annually contributes \$15,000 to the seminary budget, and additional gifts made through Christmas Share are designated for scholarships.



EST has been asked to co-organize a conference in Ukraine with several Ukrainian theological schools. The conference will deal with the issue of nationality and ethnicity in the context of war. It will involve most of the theological institutions in Ukraine and Wojciech Szczerba will serve as one of the leaders of the organizational committee.

The seminary may also play an important role in integrating theological education in Ukraine, which remains a necessity, even or perhaps especially, in a time of war. Already now, their brothers and sisters from Ukraine can use their offices, website, share their experience with their students, and are taught by EST teachers.

Contributions to help the seminary with its ongoing daily operations can be made through the church (designate for Poland Seminary). ■