



The
**United
Reformed
Church**

Maidenhead

ENTERPRISE

The magazine of the Maidenhead United Reformed Church

Special Ukraine Edition March 2022



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Welcome to a special edition of our magazine, Enterprise.

This edition is for everyone who is involved, wants to be involved, doesn't know what to do or who wants to understand what is going on with the Maidenhead Aid for Ukraine project. Whether you are driven to take action by faith, fear, anger or love – you are welcome here.

It contains articles from volunteers, coordinators, and the Minister's diary of each exhausting and exhilarating day. And there are prayers for the situation and plans for the next steps.

Maria, one of the volunteers sets the scene.

'Ukraine, land of my father, from the golden dome of St Sophia's cathedral in Kyiv to the wide open steppes that provide the world with food and the beautiful Black Sea resort of Odes, (yes, this is the correct spelling), the forests and marshes, the mountains, lakes and rivers, the wonderful historic architecture, the relics of the saints in the many monasteries: this is the Ukraine I remember from my visits.

The Ukrainian people are a Christian nation, converted in 988 by Volodymyr the Great, religion and belief in God runs through their hearts and veins. Their daily greeting to each other in the rural villages is "For God" (a shortened version of their way of saying thank the Lord that everything is ok with you) and "Glory to Jesus Christ".

The Ukrainians have a rich cultural identity and many well-known artists, engineers, academics, scientists etc are Ukrainian - something else Russia tries to claim as her own, along with the birth of the nation Kyivan Rus.

Despite Ukraine's constant struggle for survival during many occupations over the centuries they still stand, they are open and welcoming to all, they will do their utmost for you, they love, they laugh, they like a good party. But most of all

they are strong willed: it is in their DNA. That is why they will NEVER give in. They may be overrun but their souls belong to God and Ukraine.

When my father managed to return home after the collapse of the Soviet Union, after 50 odd years, he wept at the disfigurement wrought on his country by the Soviet Union. The poorly-built and maintained infrastructure, houses, factories and the destruction of the countryside during the collectivisation of land.

Today I weep as those same forces seek to destroy my spiritual home: Ukraine.'

Pause for prayer

Loving God, your Son Jesus Christ, wept over Jerusalem.

Today, we weep over Ukraine.

We weep for those uprooted from their homes and lives.

We weep for those cowering in basements.

We weep for those who have witnessed death and destruction on their streets.

We weep for those separated from parents, from children, from spouses and siblings.

We are amazed at the resilience of people seeking to comfort those in need and so we pray for Governments opening up borders so that Ukrainians can have safe passage.

We pray for churches and individuals providing food, clothing and shelter.

We pray for medical workers ensuring that shattered bodies are put back together again.

We pray for ordinary Russians demonstrating and voicing their disapproval of the military actions in Ukraine.

May the Holy Spirit give us the willpower to turn our tears into action also.

May we, through our words, prayers and example pursue the things that make for a just peace in the world today and especially in Ukraine.

In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen

Source: Methodist Church

Interview with Jolanta, a founder member of the team

We didn't know you a few weeks ago and now we see you lots. Tell us about yourself.

My name is Jolanta Pietrusinska and I came to UK just after high school. I thought I will work in summer holidays and will go back to Poland to study, But I really liked here and we stayed over for one more year. Then we thought we don't want to move back. We bought a property and we were very hard working couple.

Then back in 2006 my first daughter Julia was born- unfortunately when she was born she had a lack of oxygen, she didn't breathe for fifteen minutes. Doctors brought her back to life. As you can imagine fifteen minutes is a long time for a brain and she has Celebral Palsy. Then we went back to Poland for five years as I decided that I have to study something that will help my daughter. So Physiotherapy was my journey then.

When I finished we came back to UK again. I was always active at school.

I always want to do something to help anyone who needed help. As my daughter was born I couldn't come back to work full time. I have tried to work as physio here in UK but it didn't work out as whenever they rang me from Julia's school I had to be immediately there.

For past many years I was suffering from depression/ anxiety and only helping others and work gives me a peace of mind.

You've obviously been moved by what's been going on. How did you respond?

So when I first saw on TV what is happening on Ukrainian/Polish border in Hrebenne (twelve kms from my home town) I contacted my family and friends and I knew that I couldn't sit on the sofa and watch this awful news. I was very, very sad on Monday 28th of February and I shared my feelings with Hayley. She wrote back; shall we do something to help this people? I didn't think one minute! Absolutely yes.

We spread a message on our Year 6 chat at St Piran's and that's how it started.

I thought - I will fit all donations in my garage/maybe in summer house. By Thursday my garage was already full! Then I met kind man David at church and they all were kind to help.

But how did you know what was needed?

I contacted the government in my town as my friend is working there and she mentioned that in towns there are plenty of donations but villages are having nothing. She shared a contact with the Director of Cultural Centre and when I had spoken to her I knew what was needed.

Can you tell us a bit about the place we are supporting?

Susiec is beautiful place where people go for holidays from towns as it's natural and so beautiful and quiet... They have a lot of holiday homes there which people rent. These days there are refugees in all the houses. If they are staying for free they can go to the centre and get things they need for free. The people there are great. When they don't need what we have sent them, they take it into Ukraine - it means they will send to Ukrainian hospitals things like baby formula, nappies, torches, thermos flasks for soldiers.

How do you feel now?

I am so happy now. I feel positive and needed and also as I am always saying "this is not only Ukraine war, it's our war"; they fight for our peace and it's our duty to help.

What do you think about what we are doing?

My idea is: I will help as long as help is needed. And when will it end? Hopefully one day! I want to help with other projects then. My brain needs to be busy! It's my medicine for life.

Diary of one week in March, written by our Minister, David Downing

Wednesday 2nd March 2022

By the day before it was evident that Europe was on the verge of a mass movement of people as women and young children were leaving Ukraine. It takes around 16 hours without queues to get from Kyiv to Poland. If you can get petrol. If you add on queuing time... it takes days. You've seen the news. If you don't have that option, you are trying to get a train, bus, or walking. But people were leaving Ukraine; many were going to Poland. In church we started to email round saying that we will be raising money to send help to those towns and villages that are starting to receive refugees.

"The URC West Street is always first in opening up and supporting when there is a need". Quote from supporter who had been involved in filling and packing Samaritan's Purse Shoe Boxes.

Thursday 3rd

In the morning, I felt it would be a missed opportunity not to email the contact we had built up through lockdown with the Polish School (Agata) that used to use our church. I offer her a conversation about space that we might be able to offer at church for donations.

Thursday morning, someone (at this time unknown to us) speaks to Agata saying that the donations that they hoped they would receive have grown beyond the walls of their garage! More space was needed.

Thursday lunchtime, there is a conversation about possible use of the church and the possibility of opening the church for donations.

Thursday afternoon, we put out news that Maidenhead URC will be a donation

**UKRAINE
DONATION
CENTRE**



**SEE DOOR FOR
WHAT'S NEEDED &
OPENING TIMES**

point and collection point for specific donations. This news is spread out on four local WhatsApp groups, the church Facebook page, and Churches Together in Maidenhead's Facebook page.

We would be open only on Friday between 9:30am and 4pm.

By Thursday night, I was worried that so few people had got in touch... what if we only got six packs of nappies?

Oh well, it would still help.

Friday 4th

At 7:30am we are told that the donations from that person's garage will be arriving at church around 9:15am, and there may be some more donations coming in soon after that. That's fine, I know that some church people are coming to help through the day, and one or two others.

10am, the church is getting flooded. Donation after donation. Bag after bag. Box after box. And story after story.

Some of us have been involved in this sort of thing before... but it was different. But we know the processes, the logistics. Donations are received in Room 1, and then certain items are transferred together to the big church hall. Nappies. Baby wipes. Sanitary products. Baby food and milk.

I think we had a short coffee break, I can't remember. Some of us had a 15 minute lunch break.

By early afternoon, we know it will be necessary to open again on Saturday.



It is organised chaos! Thank you especially to those who helped make the process work. Thank you to those who made drinks.

By 4pm, we are just about on top of what we hoped to have done. We close for donations.

By 5pm, we have so many donations come in over that last hour that the corridors in church are full, the entrance is full. Bags are piling up. We close 'again' around 5:30pm. By 6pm the church is quiet for the first time since just before 9am.

There is a lot of work to do tomorrow!

Jo and I are back at church for 9:45pm to receive donations again! The church is closed just after 10pm.

People have come from churches, families, WhatsApp groups, Covid community groups, schools, and more... social media has pushed this morning more than we could ever have imagined.

So much for six packs of nappies!

Saturday 5th

The new WhatsApp group we have set up for key volunteers is pinging from 7:45am with news of donations coming in.

Many of the people who volunteered on Friday came back! The cleared church that they left the evening before didn't exist! The wall of nappies in the church hall stood firm. The hallways were full, and from 9am we just left the doors open. Donation after donation. Some big some small. Some from individuals, some from families.

There are more helpers today, thank God!

'For a number of different reasons, it had been a difficult morning and none of us were in the mood to do anything other than sulk in our rooms. This is sometimes a very bad idea, and so I decided to take my daughters to help pack some boxes. We ended up sorting and packaging many hundreds of packets of wipes: baby wipes, surface wipes, hand wipes - you name it, we saw it come our way. It was only about halfway through our session that I realised that my daughters weren't fighting any more, but rather brilliantly helping each other out and working together.'

It was a great reminder of many things: that it's sometimes important to force yourself to get out of the house. That finding a shared task is a really important way of galvanising us. Above all, that doing something for other people can make you feel useful and really good, if even only for a short while. I'm so glad all three of us got that opportunity.'



Chris, volunteer

No longer can Room 1 be used for receiving donations, it's too full. People are sorting soup from porridge, drinks, from snacks. Some are standing, and some are sitting.

We close for donations early afternoon, but word has got out and the bags keep arriving.

Who donated?

I think there were three types of people who donated.

Type 1: left in tears. Just blown away by what they were seeing and what they were a part of.

Type 2: left with a smile knowing that they had done something humble, yet refusing to stay at home while others suffered.

Type 3: they left, just stunned.

There was only one type of volunteer... Tired! Some worked the morning, some the afternoon, some the whole day... all must have been tired.

We stop late afternoon, and now we realise just how many bags have been donated that we simply can't handle. Too many clothes! We just aren't doing clothes.

As we finish for the day, you can only just get into the Link reception area, it's full of bags. And we have been told that there are more donations coming Sunday morning!

We will therefore be opening 9:30 - 12:30 for volunteers and donations.

'We called in at the church on the first Saturday of the appeal meaning just to donate some baby food. However, when we saw the stack of goods and at that time few volunteers, we took our coats off and set to work. Our task was to pack all the soup donations into cardboard boxes, and my goodness was that a job! There was a table full of packet soups as well as a considerable number of tins, and no sooner had we turned our back on the stack to put some into boxes, than

the pile was replaced by more, and the mountain was as high if not higher. This went on for an hour and a half by which time the soup had become more or less



packed, to be replaced by a mountain of porridge oats. At this point we left, but will have another session later in the week. Our abiding memory, apart from soup, was the camaraderie and friendliness of the volunteers, all working together in one cause.

It was a joy to meet with the Polish volunteers particularly and to help give some humanitarian aid to a country so very much in need.'

John and Diana, volunteers

Sunday 6th

The church is so nice and quiet at 9am. But by 9:10 the volunteers are arriving, and they are determined to clear the entrance area for church members.

Cutlery is being paired. Food is being boxed.

The nappy wall is... being fixed after its collapse the day before.

Loads of children are here packing and drawing messages of support to go into each box, and the volunteering has to go on all through the morning while church is going on.

There's just not enough time for everyone to break for an hour; the lorry isn't coming on Thursday, it's now coming on Monday.



During worship, we get all those who are volunteering or who have volunteered to come to the front of the sanctuary and we applaud them. It is an amazing effort from all ages. It is all age worship!



By the time church has finished, so much has been done. Everything (well, 90%) is boxed and in its place.

We know that Theresa May is coming to visit, and after we have cleared security she visits. She is shown around by some of the women who have Polish or Ukrainian family.

And meets the three founder coordinators Jolanta, Hayley and Natalie.



By lunch time, we are done. Everything still needs to be labelled properly. But, everything is in its right place. Unlike the people we are helping.

We don't know when the lorry is coming... we will get two hours' notice.

The last real work of the day is setting up a coordinators group. If only we could say the work is done. It isn't. We are entering a period of time when people will be forced to move in greater numbers than since the Second World War.

This is probably just the start.

Monday and Tuesday

To be honest, I can't remember much about these days! Still waiting for firm news about the arrival time of the truck, but it should be leaving Leeds at 2pm on the Thursday.

More donations.

More sorting.

More packing.

More boxing.



Wednesday 9th

Thankfully we have fewer donations... just 30 bags today! Following really helpful conversations with the URC Head Office, we will be having someone come from the URC Press Office tomorrow to cover the loading! Following this, we also get a mention on BBC 5 Live!

The halls are full, and things are ready to go! We are all set for the truck to arrive on Thursday evening now... which is great because we hear today that it will be with us around 8am on Thursday! We start planning how we can feed the volunteers etc.

Arrangements are made to ensure those coming in the morning to help load will be greeted and given breakfast.

No one is quite sure if we will get everything on to the truck! Hard to see what we have got and picture the size of the truck.

Thursday 10th – Day 8

Early start!

The church is already buzzing by 7:30am with people doing last minute things – including cooking hotdogs for the helpers!



The truck will be arriving just after 9am. Some volunteers have to leave – things like work getting in the way.

Other help arrives – Ann-Marie Nye from URC head office.

Then the truck arrives, and we arrange the best ways to load it. Things will be taken through the Link as the truck has parked nicely behind the church.



Box by box, the hall is emptied... some carried while others are pushed!



When it comes to the nappies, the truck is moved, and we form a human chain to load them.

590 boxes

and

**266 sets of nappies
(that's around 1500
nappy packs!)**



When it gets to 11:35 it is time for the truck to leave. We are impressed by the inch accuracy he has in turning the truck and moving it from the back of the church. He reverses down West Street until he can reverse again and drive off.

I think for many of us it was an emotional experience watching it drive off. But we still aren't sure about customs etc. We have heard news of trucks being kept



there for hours as they struggle to get post Brexit paperwork sorted.

By Thursday evening, we have heard that the truck is through customs and off. We have got it right!

We wait now...

'I have never been known as an early bird, but on Thursday I was up and down at the church by 7.30am. But as soon as I glimpsed the piles of boxes and the mountains of nappies I was wide awake – what an amazing sight. After a hot dog and a few coffees the lorry arrived, the 60-foot artic, with its appropriate yellow cab. Everyone got into action and the atmosphere became electric, just so exciting. We wheeled and lugged boxes, threw nappies to each other in a human chain ... and two hours later the lorry was full. How was it going to squeeze out of the tight gap between the hall and the hotel? But behind the wheel was a calm Polish driver, a real hero! The load was on its way with our love – I could feel the tears welling up! Then to be able to watch the video of the unloading in Susiec a couple of days later ...'

Alison, a volunteer

PS - A text was sent to our wonderful driver Tomas once he was safely on his way:

'You are amazing!'

His reply: 'No - you guys are amazing!'

Saturday Evening, 12th March

In darkness the truck arrives in Susiec! We are sent great footage of it being unloaded. This part of the journey is complete. People are fed, children are cared for, people have medication and more because of the amazing response of Maidenhead which is over 1000 miles away.

Susiec is in the East of Poland, close to the border with Ukraine. On the map you can see Lviv in Ukraine which features regularly on the news as one of the routes out to the West and is 70 miles from Susiec.



You can see the arrival and unloading at

<https://www.facebook.com/MaidenheadAidforUkraine/>

Now we get ready to go again!!!

But we have stood up for humanity over conflict.

We have stood up for our neighbours.

We have said we will not tolerate such inhumanity.

We made a statement that has reminded us and others that love is the greatest weapon we have.

And that's why we will do it again....

But not for a day or two.

As we have done for this load, we will wait to hear what those people dealing with this in Poland want.

Until then.... Time to rest, and plan!

'I was amazed at the number of people who brought items and came round to help – both people we know and many more people whom we had not met before. It reminded me of Acts chapter 2 verse 43 – 47 which describes how the first Christians lived and worked together as part of their community.'

Bob, a volunteer

The Donations – what have we been offered and where from?

The good...

So many people donated what had been asked for. Although we have been left with loads of bags of clothes which we can't take, it's not bad considering how much we actually received!

The travellers

One person saw a Facebook post and emailed a friend to ask if they could make a donation on their behalf... they couldn't do it themselves because they were on a cruise ship in Norway. One car-load of donations was gratefully received from near Coventry!

The weird

Colostomy bags! Of all the things to be offered! But the weird thing was.... We needed them as we knew of someone in Poland who could use them!

The bag

In one bag that was donated, there were three bars of soap. On one of them was a note that read "I'm so sorry, this is all I can afford to donate".

The tape

We advertised what we wanted... and we needed tape to build boxes. One person popped in to see their neighbour to say that they were going to volunteer at the church so couldn't pop in later. The neighbour apologised that

they didn't have anything to donate. Then after thinking about it, she went off and came back with a freezer bag which contained 2 new rolls of brown tape and 2 half used rolls. She offered them as all she had, saying "at 102 I doubt I'll be packaging much more in my life"!

The repeat

One lady came with some pouches of baby food. She handed over her bag and looked round. She was so impressed that she came back an hour later with a bag full of more baby food!

From here, there, and everywhere...

When asked how people had heard about what we were doing, the responses (in no particular order) were: Churches, schools, WhatsApp groups, Facebook shares, the Town Hall, friends, and.... "I can't remember!"

Form a queue please...

People brought in their bags and their boxes...but FoodShare came with eight shopping trolleys which they pushed down through the High Street.

Silver service

Just when we realised that there weren't enough knives, forks and spoons for the people in Poland to eat what we were sending, Cliveden (National Trust) offered trays of their cutlery which they no longer needed.

Date Stamp

Of all the food and medicine that we were given only a handful has been out of date or in very poor condition.

This and that

Some donated soup, some porridge, some nappies, some wipes, some biscuits for the volunteers, some their time, some bought lunch for others, and some their experience.... Everyone gave themselves.

Visitors

It was great to have our MP Theresa May visit us on the first Sunday. She was shown around by Jolanta, Natalie and Hayley and she took a great interest in what we were doing. She was impressed by the work we were doing, especially as we weren't duplicating other projects.



The children who were around were able to talk to her and spend time with her... but that didn't stop her packing a food box!

I think her visit gave a great sense of encouragement to everyone who was there!

And this message received from Poland is what it's all about:

'We are all very pleased... and your support is important. What you have

done for our people with your donations of humanitarian aid is very important and pleasant, both for those who left and for those who stayed. We have a saying "The world is not without good people" and now I am even more convinced. Thank you, we will definitely win'

How does this affect the church?

We have taken the decision to close the main hall for the next few months so that we can set it aside for what is going on. Some people have asked how long it might go on for – and in truth, we would love to know! But there is so much need, and we feel that this is a great way to serve God:

'When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?' Then the King will say, 'I am telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me - you did it to me.'

We will not ignore those caught up in such need now. It will disrupt certain things, but our user groups have been understanding and have moved to other rooms. Even the bags in the sanctuary remind us that the work going on is worship, just as much as singing hymns.

What can I do?

So many people have asked what they can do.

We have made a donation to the Salvation Army. They have centres in so many parts of the world and respond so well in times of crisis. They have centres in Moldova which is a country that is really struggling with refugees from Ukraine. Please remember them in your prayers.

We also want to encourage giving to the DEC (Disaster Emergency Committee). They are organising centres and dealing with many of the main situations.

But, as you may have gathered, the project we are enabling is dealing with a town that does not have other charities working in it.

So, how to help if you want to:

Donate We need things that are on our list. Nothing else! The list changes and evolves as we hear what is needed in Poland so keep your eyes on Facebook or ask.

Volunteer We have six donation sessions per week and need helpers to greet



people at the door, others to make tea and coffee, while some will sort and box.

Some of this can be done sitting down. Every single role is just as important as any of the others. If you can offer time, please let Linda (our Administrator in the office)

know in advance. You can just turn up, but it is helpful for us to know who is coming and when.

Pray Seriously, prayer is needed for the whole situation, for donations, and for volunteers.

Pause for prayer

Borders, barricades, bewilderment...

When the bargaining begins,

God please protect peace.

Sanctions, security measured in minutes and it's scary...

When safety scatters,

God please protect peace.

War dresses up in peace-keeper's clothes,

Troops amass, the ground trembles and so do people...

When the future feels fragile,

God please protect peace.

The littlest, the least likely to have a say,

Those whose lives are sanctioned and bargained over –

Violence always finds them first.

And the 'oh-so-important' political manoeuvres mean nothing to them.

They just want to live.

When the winners want to wipe them out of the way,

God please protect peace.

We will not turn away. We will stand together –

God give us the strength to protect peace. Amen

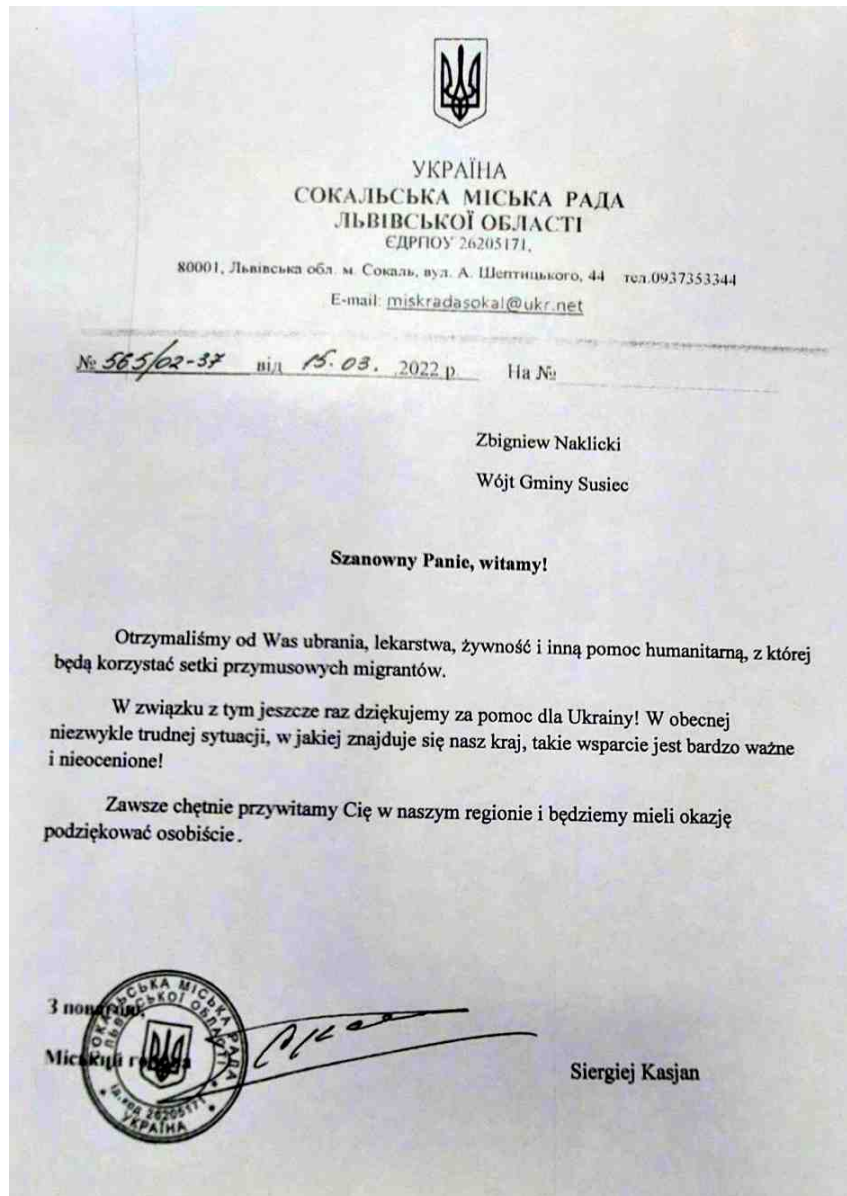
Source: Christian Aid

What next?

By the time you are reading this:

- We will be connected with Marlow URC who will be gathering donations for our truck.
- We will be launching an appeal for hearts which are going to be added to boxes
- We will have connected with several local businesses who are giving amazing support
- We will have more people connected to our church than ever before!

And just so that you know that this is really working ...



Translation of a letter from a village in Ukraine which received donations we sent to Susiec:

We received from you clothes, medicines, food and other humanitarian donations that will be used by hundreds of Ukrainian migrants.

Once again we would like to thank you for your help to Ukraine. In our current, difficult situation this kind of support is very important and invaluable.

It will be an honour to welcome you in our region and thank you in person.

Let's keep going!

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Zoom:

If you would like to be kept in touch with things that are going on in the church using Zoom, please email David.

Post:

If you don't use Zoom or email but would like to stay in touch with what is happening at the church, please let us know so that you can be updated by post.

YouTube:

Our channel can be found by searching for: Maidenhead and Marlow URC.

Facebook:

Find us on Facebook by searching for: Maidenhead URC

<https://www.facebook.com/maidenheadurc/>

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Photos in this edition are from members