

From Rev. John Calhoun, United Methodist missionary in Kyiv, Ukraine

April 1, 2018

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Greetings in the name of our risen Lord Jesus Christ, and Happy Easter! I pray that you and your loved ones have celebrated a joyous day of resurrection, and that you are well and blessed in the Lord. In the words of the traditional Russian-language Easter greeting, "Христос воскрес! Во истину воскрес!" ("Khristos voskres! Vo istinu voskres!") Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Because the Orthodox Church sets the date of its observance of Easter in accordance with the ancient Julian calendar, this year most Christian communities in Ukraine and Russia will celebrate Easter next Sunday, April 8. Thus here in Kyiv, only a small number of churches marked Easter today. One of these communities was Christ Church, the local English-speaking congregation of the Church of England. This small ecumenical congregation in the heart of Kyiv comprises believers from a variety of nations, races, and Christian traditions. As a member of the English-speaking Christian community in Kyiv, I was asked to deliver the Easter sermon and assist in celebrating the Eucharist. It was a great blessing for me to share the gospel on this most holy day, and to distribute the bread and wine, the body and blood of our risen Lord Jesus.

Meanwhile, for Orthodox Christians here in Ukraine (and others who follow the Julian calendar in observing Easter), today is *вербное воскресенье* ("verbnoye voskresen'ye"), or Willow Sunday. As palm branches are not indigenous to lands this far north, Christians have for

centuries celebrated the Sunday before Easter (Palm Sunday in our tradition) by bringing willow branches to church to be blessed by the local priest; the willow tree is one of the first to blossom in the early spring.

Unfortunately, in Kyiv our early spring has been marred by

heavy snow, piles of which still line the streets today, thus preventing the willows from blossoming. Still, those who celebrated *вербное воскресенье* today found a way to praise Jesus in remembrance of his triumphant entry into Jerusalem.



Amidst the joyous celebrations of our religious traditions, the people of Ukraine recently marked a painful date--the fourth anniversary of the annexation of Crimea by Russia. This act of aggression sparked a war in eastern Ukraine that to date has claimed the lives of more than 10,000 people, and has displaced more than one million from their homes. In recent months, the streets of Kyiv have been clogged with protesters; ordinary citizens are taking to the streets to condemn corruption in government and the ongoing conflict in the east of the country. In a season of hope and new life, the people of Ukraine feel the heavy weight of political and economic turmoil. I ask you to continue to keep the people of Ukraine in your prayers, that the fighting in the east would cease and that all those scarred by war and suffering would find healing.

Finally, I ask you to continue to pray for our young adult medical students from Africa who participate in the ministry of the United Methodist Church in Ukraine. Here in Kyiv, we continue to gather each Sunday for a time of Bible study and fellowship, before joining the Ukrainian United Methodist congregation for worship. It's a blessing to be in ministry with young persons who are dedicating their lives to the healing of bodies and souls.

I thank you for your prayers, your words of encouragement, and your partnership in ministry. It is an honor to represent you as a missionary of the United Methodist Church.

May God bless you in this season of Easter!

Yours in Christ,
John

To support my mission service in Ukraine, [click here](#) to make a donation through the secure Global Ministries website. Fully 100% of your donation goes in support of mission service.

Thank you for your prayerful and generous support.

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