

The Russian Invasion of Ukraine

A briefing and resource for reflection, discussion and action

Produced by the Joint Public Issues Team of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church, July 2023



The conflict in Ukraine after Russia’s invasion in February 2022 is a tragedy that continues to devastate the lives of millions of people. The Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed Churches seek to be attentive to the concerns of all people in Russia and Ukraine affected by the war, be they fighting, suffering, offering aid or seeking refuge.

The shocking return of conflict in Europe has brought war closer to home, and yet in the UK most of us still only see its effects second-hand, through media or the accounts of those from Ukraine who have come to the UK for safety. Many might feel that action should be taken against the unjust aggression of President Putin, and yet are unclear exactly what this should look like. Members of our three denominations approach the topic of war and peace from a diverse range of perspectives. The intention of this briefing is not to privilege any one particular response, but to support people in reflecting on the questions prompted by the conflict.

The briefing begins with an overview of the causes and costs of the war, contextualised in Christian thinking. It then explores the topics of sanctions, nuclear weapons and the implications of the war. The briefing then looks at ecumenical relations between our denominations and the Orthodox churches of Russia and Ukraine. Finally, the briefing concludes with a call to action, thinking through how as individuals and as church communities we might respond to the ongoing fighting in Ukraine.



Table of Contents

1. The conflict

Causes and impact of the invasion.....	2
Christian responses to the war	2
Future scenarios.....	3

2. International and UK responses to the war

Sanctions	5
Military support	6
Nuclear weapons.....	6

3. The wider impact of the conflict

Refugees.....	7
Food insecurity.....	8
UK government spending priorities	8

4. The role of the Churches during the conflict

Churches in Ukraine	9
Ecumenical relations in Europe and beyond.....	10

5. Responding through prayer, action and advocacy

Further resources.....	12
------------------------	----

1. The conflict

Causes and impact of the invasion

Russia's invasion on 24th February 2022 began with a failed attempt to capture Kiev. By April, Russia had withdrawn from the north of the country and appear now to be concentrating their efforts on holding on to the Donbass region and the southern provinces that would provide a strategic land bridge to Crimea. It is likely that over one hundred thousand members of the Ukrainian and Russian armies have been killed or injured in the conflict to date. Due to misinformation and incomplete data, we may not know the actual numbers until the conflict is brought to an end. Over 10,000 Ukrainian civilians have been killed and there are now over 8 million Ukrainians who are refugees in Europe, placing enormous stresses on those separated from their homes and loved ones.

Why did Russia invade Ukraine?

While there can be no justification for President Vladimir Putin's devastating invasion of Ukraine, the roots of the conflict can be traced to various events since the establishment of Ukraine as an independent state in 1991. Inevitably, perspectives on these events are contested and coloured by politics, history and culture. One view is that Russia's actions fundamentally arise from Putin's desire to maximise Russia's influence in the former territories of the Soviet Union and restore a 'Greater Russia'. An alternative perspective recognises that US and NATO military interventions have, to varying degrees, been designed to extend US influence. In the 1990s the Russian Government was upset that the US encouraged NATO expansion (for example to Ukraine and Georgia) in preference to a more co-operative security structure in Europe. There are suspicions of US influence over the 2014 Maidan protests in the square in the centre of Kiev and evidence of attempts by the US government to influence the political transition following the fall of the Russian-leaning government of Viktor Yanukovich, a government steeped in corruption. Within Russia, Vladimir Putin exerts control over narratives and attempts to frame the war as protection of Russian-speaking Ukrainians from a 'fascist' government in Kiev. Whatever provocation may have been caused by NATO's actions over the years, this cannot serve as justification for this invasion of sovereign territory and the human suffering that has ensued.

What are the likely long-term impacts of the invasion of Ukraine?

There have been very strong cultural and family ties between Russia and Ukraine which the war has torn apart. Relations between Ukraine and Russia will take a very long time to repair. A further legacy of this conflict will be the damage to infrastructure. In September 2022 the World Bank put the cost of rebuilding at \$350 billion, a sum that is rising all the time.

What are the environmental impacts of the war?

Armed conflict can have a serious impact on local environments. In Ukraine contamination by chemicals and toxins from armaments are affecting 20% of Ukraine natural conservation areas and 300,000 hectares of forest have also been damaged. There is already a large amount of unexploded ordinance in areas that have seen fierce fighting but extensive use of US cluster munitions would significantly add to this problem.¹ There is a huge carbon footprint arising from the emissions of the military activities of both nations. There will also be a longer-term impact arising from the resources that will be required to rebuild shattered towns and cities.

Christian responses to the war

In the face of the horror and suffering of war, a natural first response is lament. Lament is a means by which we acknowledge our grief and sorrow at the wickedness of our world and the poverty of the human condition. It is given expression in the Psalms and other places in the Old Testament. It offers a way of expressing to God in prayer the

¹ See [Why the US should change course on sending cluster munitions to Ukraine \(jpit.uk\)](https://www.jpit.uk/why-the-us-should-change-course-on-sending-cluster-munitions-to-ukraine/)

pain and suffering in our world, and in so doing identifying with the suffering of millions of Ukrainians who are refugees in Europe, members of the Ukrainian and Russian armies who have been killed and injured, and many Ukrainian civilians also killed and injured. Lament recognises that we often don't have adequate answers, and that the situation in Ukraine is so horrendous that we need God's wisdom and strength even to be able to process the questions.

Is this a 'just war'?

While the earliest Christians understood Jesus' teaching as making the use of violence illegitimate for Christians, later generations of believers came to the understanding that a war fought for the right reason and in the right way could be a way of expressing the Christian responsibility to love their neighbour. Those who hold to such a 'just war' position are unlikely to have much difficulty in justifying Ukraine's defence against invasion. However, importantly in this tradition the aim of any military response to armed aggression must be a restoration of justice (which can entail punishment for the 'evil-doer') and a seeking after peace. It is not the role of the 'competent authority' alone to determine what justice looks like but, rather, this must encompass a hearing from victims on all sides, and the involvement where possible of international bodies to encourage an objective judicial mind-set.

Resources on Baptist, Methodist and URC thinking around just war can be found in the reports *Peacemaking: A Christian Vocation*² and *Drones: Ethical Dilemmas in the Application of Military Force* (Section 3)³

How have Christians in Ukraine responded to Russia's invasion and to defence of their country?

In Ukraine there is little dissent within the Churches on the need to take up arms in defence of the country, but the experience of violent conflict has been challenging for many Christians. For example, Dr. Ivan Rusyn, a Ukrainian pastor and president of the Evangelical Protestant seminary in Ukraine, said: "I used to be a pacifist ... Now I believe that only the nation that has known the horror of war has the right to speak about pacifism ... My theology has been changed. For me, peacemaking is not a passive thing anymore, an ability to absorb and embrace everything. No, it is very active – active in order to stop violence."⁴

What can active non-violence achieve in this context?

The pacifist witness seeks to keep alive, even in the face of war, the rejection of militarism that is ingrained in our societies. It does not place trust in weapons or in those who wield them, but instead challenges governments to invest more time, energy and resources in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. There are pacifist voices in both Russia and Ukraine that reject violence as a means of resolving this conflict.

While non-violent forms of resistance have been instrumental in some conflicts, this is not a direction that most Ukrainians find acceptable in response to the Russian invasion. Even so, pacifist activism can play a role in declaring that war is evil, leading the call for an end to the violence in Ukraine, finding opportunities for dialogue and highlighting the need for all Governments to be held to account.

Of course this is not an exclusive role of any particular strand of theological thinking as the counter-cultural calling to be peacemakers and reconcilers is universal.

Future scenarios

The future of the conflict is difficult to predict, but with both militaries well embedded in defensive positions there is a likelihood that the conflict could become protracted. Ukraine is hoping that modern weaponry from NATO countries, including advanced tanks and fighter jets, will enable Ukraine to defeat the Russian forces. The UK and

² <https://jpit.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Peacemaking-Report.pdf>

³ <https://jpit.uk/issues/peacemaking/drones>

⁴ <https://www.plough.com/en/topics/faith/prayer/war-and-the-church-in-ukraine>

other allies could find themselves in the dangerous situation of being drawn ever more deeply into the conflict, needing to provide a growing military contribution to avoid a Ukrainian defeat, while the terms of settlement are not in their hands. The longer the fighting continues the greater the risk of a confrontation between NATO states and Russia, through miscalculation, if not by design.

What would be the consequences of a collapse of the Russian government under a Wagner-style mutiny?

In June 2023, forces loyal to Yevgeny Prigozhin marched on Moscow, firing on Russia military aircraft in the process. This challenge to President Putin's authority was called off but it served to underline the potential vulnerability of his government. A change at the top seems attractive if it could hasten the end of Russia's military action in Ukraine. However, any leader coming in after Putin inherits a political system and set of policies that are only likely to evolve incrementally over time. Any hostile challenge to President Putin would require support from within the army. There are a number of senior figures in the Russian elite that are more authoritarian and have used more violent rhetoric than Putin himself.

What could be the elements of a lasting peace?

A Russian military that is defeated today can be re-built tomorrow, so the terms on which the conflict is brought to a conclusion are important. For this reason, Ukraine's military action to secure its defence should not have as its aim the defeat of a nation but rather the achievement of justice for all. A lasting peace requires negotiation and this usually involves compromises on all sides. At some point a negotiation with Russia will be required to ensure a stable, secure and sovereign Ukraine, but a limited armistice-style agreement would not address underlying tensions. A further and larger prize would be an agreement to resolve the wider security fears of both Russia and other European states. A new security architecture in the region is needed so that a future 'approximate' peace does not rely on the inherently uncertain arrangement of armies facing off over international borders. Consequently, a ceasefire does not in itself indicate the advent of peace, but under very specific circumstances a ceasefire could provide the basis on which, in the future, true peace can be built for Ukraine, Russia and for Europe.

So should we be calling for an immediate ceasefire?

Every day that the conflict continues is a day when Russian and Ukrainian soldiers will be killed, civilians will be placed at risk, communities will suffer the mental trauma of war and families will endure separation. Yet our desire to see an immediate end to the fighting faces the political reality of the necessary sequencing to arrive at a just resolution. If Western governments were to call for an immediate ceasefire, Russian aggression is likely to be rewarded with territory, in which case military strength and raw power will have overshadowed human rights. Several church leaders in Europe have spoken out against Russia's invasion while taking care to avoid superficial incriminations. They have drawn attention to atrocities, deplored attacks on civilians, and urged all parties to negotiate in the cause of peace.

What are the prospects and challenges for dialogue between communities?

While it is always challenging, dialogue across national borders can be pursued amid violent conflict. Unfortunately, since the Russian invasion, the intergovernmental dialogue with Russia has been greatly curtailed and the usual diplomatic channels between governments are severely impaired. There are also constraints on dialogue between groups in the civil space, including churches. At the moment open and honest dialogue is constrained by the various risks to any citizen based in Russia whose views diverge from that of the Government and who might be perceived as collaborating with the 'enemy'. However, the process of listening to each other is vital. Even after declaring its support for the war (see below), the Russian Orthodox Church remains a member of the World Council of Churches and was able to send a large delegation to the WCC General Assembly gathering in Germany in 2022.

What contributions can faith groups make towards peace and reconciliation in Ukraine?

Christian communities can pray for each other and explore ways to share with each other across the divide of war. Keeping open these civil societal relations will not resolve the political impasse between states but can (a) help to build understanding and avoid future misunderstanding, (b) demonstrate the desire of all for a negotiated end to this tragic war, and (c) amid the polarising narratives of ‘enemies’, ‘fascists’ and ‘criminals’, maintain respect for our common humanity across the divisions created by war and oppose rising nationalisms that conflict can encourage, d) in the midst of conflict speak out on the treatment of prisoners of war, oppose the use of cluster munitions and other indiscriminate weaponry, insist that all militaries are held accountable for their conduct and ensure the protection of civilians and as well as internally displaced and refugees.

The Christian responsibility to advocate for peace and to imagine its possibilities becomes that much more pertinent during times of war. Conflict is a painful reminder of the frailty of the human condition and points to the need to look to our reconciling God for wisdom, humility and perseverance. Whether we are instinctively drawn more towards just war or pacifist positions, we share a common agenda for active peace-making as followers of the Prince of Peace.

2. International and UK responses to the war

Sanctions

One early response to the Russian invasion was the imposition of sanctions on the activities of the Russian state, businesses and individuals by the UK and other Western nations. A wide range of sanctions have already been implemented, from the freezing of foreign exchange reserves to the UK’s targeting of over 120 oligarchs with a net worth of over £140 billion.

Are sanctions working?

In certain settings, sanctions can serve as a form of active non-violence that confronts aggression and injustice. In the context of Russia, sanctions are intended to deter against further escalation whilst also limiting the capacity of Russia to meet the high costs of war. The effectiveness of present sanctions remains a matter of debate. Whilst inflation in Russia is high and the economy shrunk by 6% in 2022 (in relation to its growth forecast for the year), the country has been successful in monetary intervention to prop up the ruble and has switched some oil and gas exports to China and India. However, sanctions have begun to cause Russia difficulties in funding its invasion, and these challenges are likely to increase if the conflict becomes further protracted.

Are sanctions ethical?

It would be difficult to justify a ‘business as usual’ approach towards Russia when it has acted so aggressively in violation of international law. Many people believe that imposing sanctions is important to send a message to any government considering aggressive actions that imperilling international order will have consequences on their economic ties with the global community. Ethical questions come to the fore around the intended purpose of sanctions, the targets of sanctions, the collateral effects (within the sanctioned state and more broadly on other states) and the proper authority to endorse any sanction regime.⁵

What are the global impacts of sanctions?

Sanctions on Russia have resulted in collateral economic impacts on households in impoverished nations in Africa and Asia. At a time of severe food shortages, many African economies have been hit with higher grain and vegetable oil prices. While the extent to which sanctions are responsible for this is unclear, there remains a popular perception among publics that they are. For many countries in Africa, any extension of further secondary sanctions by the United

⁵ For example the UN Security Council was not an option on this occasion because of Russia’s membership.

States or European nations on fuels or other strategic products would be unpopular and cause resentment. This could encourage some to strengthen economic and diplomatic ties with China, and with Russia as well.

Where does it end?

Sanctions are easier to impose than they are to lift. The ultimate hope is that sanctions lead the offending Government to decide that the costs of war outweigh the benefits, and to change course. However, the criteria for the lifting of sanctions remains unclear. If Western imposed sanctions were to linger following the negotiation of a resolution, it will increase the perception that sanctions are motivated by a desire to inflict lasting economic and political damage, rather than to accomplish a pre-determined goal. Sanctions are easier to support when the criteria are well defined.

Military support

Ukraine has received significant amounts of military support from NATO countries, including anti-tank weapons, artillery, ammunition, air-defence systems, aerial drones, tanks and armoured personnel carriers and intelligence data from satellites. In 2022, the UK provided £2.3 billion of military aid to Ukraine – more than any other European nation, with a similar amount promised for 2023. The provision of F16 fighter jets would likely be a game-changer for the Ukrainian military.

Should the UK increase its defence budget in light of the war in Ukraine?

The UK government has committed to sustaining high levels of military spending, in spite of the fiscal situation and constrained public spending budgets. In contrast, the UK's dedicated financial contribution to conflict stabilisation and mediation is relatively small and declining.

Our churches have often opposed increases in military spending on the grounds that such increases will promote strategies based on military threat while divert attention and resources from mediation, co-operation and multilateralism. The context of the war in Ukraine might cause a questioning of this position. Ukraine is clearly in critical need of armaments for its defence, but exactly how much military support and what type of support the UK should be providing? Does our support go beyond what is needed for defence capabilities? What happens to the weapons after the conflict? And what are the implications for public finances of this additional expenditure?

Nuclear weapons

Nuclear weapons have influenced strategic calculations in this conflict in two opposing directions. Firstly, NATO countries have not provided troops on the ground in Ukraine partly out of fear that this could lead to a direct confrontation with a nuclear-armed state. Secondly, Russia has been emboldened through its possession of nuclear weapons to initiate a war by conventional means.

Could Russia use nuclear weapons?

Russia is thought to have the lowest threshold for nuclear weapons use among the five nuclear-armed states, and President Putin has alluded to nuclear weapons use in some statements when referring to using "all means" to defend Russia. However, those speaking in an official capacity for Putin's administration are inclined to stress the limited circumstances for Russian use of 'tactical' nuclear weapon, to provide the international community with some reassurance.

Tactical nuclear weapons cannot provide Russia with an advantage on the battlefield, as Ukrainian forces tend to be dispersed and are relatively vulnerable to conventional strikes. Obviously, any resort to nuclear weapons, whatever their size, would have devastating and lasting consequences. There are understandable concerns that if Putin loses not only the four southern provinces but Crimea as well, he might well resort to more desperate measures. Any use of 'tactical' nuclear weapons risks nuclear escalation.

NATO leaders and China have responded to Russia's aggressive rhetoric with an insistence that a nuclear war can never be won and therefore must never be fought. It is important that this statement is not undermined by the repositioning of any nuclear forces, including US tactical nuclear weapons, during the conflict.⁶

Are there still prospects for nuclear disarmament?

Russia's invasion, plus NATO's support of the Ukrainian military forces, demonstrate only too clearly that nuclear weapons are ineffective at 'keeping the peace' and suppressing conventional conflict, contrary to the claims of nuclear-armed states.

The Baptist Union, Methodist Church and United Reformed Church have long taken the view that the use and threat of use of nuclear weapons is immoral and consider the negotiation of the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction an urgent imperative. Our Churches continue to work with global civil movements such as ICAN⁷ to realise this objective. The vast majority of the world's nations are losing patience with the vague and unfulfilled promises of the nuclear-armed states on nuclear disarmament. This must remain a focus for governments and of advocacy by churches, individuals and other groups in civil society.

More broadly the structures for negotiating arms control are in disarray; the Conference on Disarmament is ineffective and its composition and procedures are not fit for purpose. Disarmament requires a global conversation as has been afforded by the UN Secretary General's New Agenda for Peace. This should be followed as soon as possible by a fourth UN Special Session on Disarmament to restructure the global forums for diplomacy on arms control.

3. The wider impact of the conflict

Refugees

The conflict in Ukraine has forced many people to flee their homes and livelihoods to seek safety elsewhere. As of 16 May 2023, the UNHCR has recorded 8,240,289 refugees from Ukraine now displaced across Europe.⁸ This amounts to around 19% of the Ukrainian population.⁹

At this point, 174,200 Ukrainians have arrived in the UK – about 2 per cent of the total number displaced. 51,300 arrived through the "Ukraine Family Scheme" and 122,900 through the "Homes for Ukraine" government sponsorship scheme.¹⁰

What is the Homes for Ukraine scheme?

This UK government scheme provides a way for Ukrainians nationals with no family ties to the UK to be sponsored by individuals or organisations who can offer them a home. Hosts find someone to sponsor, most commonly through a dedicated support organisation, and together they support the potential guest in applying for a visa and travel to the UK. Individuals granted a visa through the scheme can live and work in the UK for up to three years, accessing healthcare, benefits, employment support, education and other support.

Hosts must commit to a minimum of 6 months of accommodation provision. They are entitled to a 'thank you' payment of £350 per month (for those hosting Ukrainians that have lived in the UK less than 12 months) or £500 (for

⁶ The United States plans to re-introduce US tactical nuclear weapons to the UK. They were withdrawn from the UK in 2006 after widespread public opposition.

⁷ ICAN - International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons ([icanw.org](https://www.icanw.org))

⁸ UNHCR Operational Data Portal - <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

⁹ Based on Eurostat data 2020-2021 - <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/ukraine>

¹⁰ UK Government Transparency data - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukraine-family-scheme-application-data/ukraine-family-scheme-and-ukraine-sponsorship-scheme-homes-for-ukraine-visa-data--2>

those hosting Ukrainians that have lived in the UK longer than 12 months – whether they have lived with that host throughout that period or not). Some local authorities are supplementing these payments.

The wide take-up of the scheme has demonstrated the generosity of many ordinary people in the UK who have taken the opportunity to show hospitality to refugees, at a time when political and media rhetoric has often tried to demonise refugees. Many churches have also stepped up to offer support through language classes, drop-ins, befriending schemes and more, ‘welcoming the stranger’ as the Bible often instructs.

Ultimately, it is telling that because this safe route exists, no Ukrainian has had to attempt to cross the Channel in a small boat.

What concerns are there about the scheme?

While our Churches have welcomed the scheme and encouraged members to participate, a number of concerns about it have been raised with the government through the Churches’ partnerships with CitizensUK and participation within the Ukraine Refugee Roundtable (CTBI/CTE). These include concerns that the UK Government has not provided hosts and Ukrainians with sufficient support for long-term accommodation that will enable Ukrainians to live independently, and that the scheme is being funded from the already substantially reduced international development budget. The disparities between this scheme and other refugee schemes have also been highlighted. Support to Ukrainian refugees is often better than that provided to refugees fleeing other parts of the world, which has created an unfair sense of “more desired” refugees.

Food insecurity

Before the current conflict, Ukraine (known as ‘Europe’s breadbasket’) and Russia together exported two-thirds of the world’s wheat, but as a result of the war, production (particularly in Ukraine) and export levels have reduced. This has had global impacts.

How are grain shortages impacting?

The effect of the conflict on food insecurity is being felt globally, exacerbated by the huge price inflation which has impacted the poorest and most vulnerable in the world. In 2020, 95% of Ukraine’s wheat exports went to Asia or Africa. The World Food Programme previously purchased over 50% of its wheat from these two countries, and due to a dramatic price increase they had to stop operating in South Sudan in early July 2022. Some of the worst droughts and flooding in the region in living memory had already created a hunger crisis in East Africa, but inflation has further compounded the issues. This will have catastrophic effects across the region, where 50 million people are already experiencing acute food insecurity in countries like Ethiopia, South Sudan and Kenya.

Growing food insecurity exacerbated by the war in Ukraine will impact the economic and social fabric of many countries for some time even after the conflict is resolved. This points to the need for sustained international humanitarian support, not only in Ukraine, but also in other countries experiencing knock-on effects of the conflict.

UK government spending priorities

With a deepening cost of living crisis and struggling public services, some people in the UK are questioning the cost of British support for Ukraine.

How is the conflict in Ukraine contributing to the cost of living crisis in the UK?

The current cost of living crisis has numerous causes, of which the Ukraine conflict is only one.¹¹ One factor has been energy prices, and while constraints on the availability of gas have been acute for some European countries and

¹¹ See JPIT briefings on the cost of living crisis: <https://ipit.uk/economy/the-cost-of-living-crisis>

prices shot up after the invasion, they are now reducing again. In the case of oil, OPEC+ producers took a decision in April 2023 to cut production as, in their view, the price of oil was not too high but too low.

Is the UK's support of Ukraine preventing the government from providing more help to people who are struggling in the UK?

The UK government's support of Ukraine has resulted in significant amounts of public expenditure, including £4.6bn on military assistance over two years, £1.5bn of economic and humanitarian support, and over £1bn on refugee and housing support to date.¹² To put this in context, overall UK government expenditure in 2023/2024 is expected to be £1,189bn,¹³ so this represents less than half of one percent of the annual total.

The government has considerable scope to direct public expenditure in line with its priorities. It is not the case that the UK's military and humanitarian support of Ukraine is preventing the government from, say, increasing Universal Credit or the Local Housing Allowance. It is possible for the UK to stand in solidarity with Ukraine without compromising the wellbeing of the poorest in our own society.

4. The role of the Churches during the conflict

Churches in Ukraine

The majority of Christians in Ukraine are Orthodox, but there are also significant numbers of Catholic and Baptist churches.

What is the situation of Orthodox Churches in Ukraine?

There are two main Eastern Orthodox Churches involved in the region:

- The Ukrainian Orthodox Church - Moscow Patriarch (12,410 parishes in 2020)
- The Orthodox Church of Ukraine (7,097 parishes in 2020)

The Orthodox Church of Ukraine was established at the Unification Council in 2018 and granted autocephaly on 5th January 2019. The Russian Orthodox Church challenged Constantinople on this decision, boycotting the Pan-Orthodox Council and breaking off relations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. This has made the Russian Orthodox Church increasingly isolated within the Orthodox community.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church - Moscow Patriarch was established in 1990, under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church. Since the invasion of Ukraine, many parishes have left the Moscow Patriarch and joined the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. On May 27th 2022, the Ukrainian Orthodox declared its independence and church leaders condemned the invasion but there remains some doubt as to how independent the Orthodox Church of Ukraine actually is in practice.¹⁴

The Ukrainian Parliament has passed legislation that would allow local authorities to ban the Ukrainian Orthodox Church¹⁵ and some regions have acted and prevented churches from meeting.¹⁶

How have the wider Orthodox Community responded to the war?

The global Orthodox community comprises many communities and traditions but affiliate with the patriarchs of either the Russian Orthodox Church or the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The latter family has been outspoken on the heresy of the Russian Orthodox Church in supporting the war. On March 13th 2022, more than 280

¹² [FactCheck: how much has the UK spent on military defence, humanitarian aid and homes for Ukraine? – Channel 4 News](#)

¹³ Office for Budgetary Responsibility, April 2023: [A brief guide to the public finances - Office for Budget Responsibility \(obr.uk\)](#)

¹⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/moscow-led-ukrainian-orthodox-church-breaks-ties-with-russia-2022-05-28/>

¹⁵ [Ukraine attempts to ban Moscow-linked UOC \(churchtimes.co.uk\)](#)

¹⁶ [Ukraine Council of Churches supports ban on Russia-affiliated church \(cne.news\)](#)

Russian Orthodox priests and church officials around the world signed an open letter expressing opposition to Russia's invasion and declaring Patriarch Kirill's 'Kievan Rus' theology a heresy.¹⁷ Support for this statement has now grown to 1,500 orthodox leaders, clergy and scholars.

What are the links with Methodist and United Reformed Churches in Ukraine?

The United Methodist Church (UMC) has congregations in both Russia and Ukraine to whom the Methodist Church in Britain relate directly as well as through the European Methodist Council. Historically, Russian and Ukrainian Methodist churches fell within the Eurasia Episcopal Area, overseen by the UMC Bishop based in Moscow. The invasion has accentuated the already difficult political dynamics for these churches and in April 2022 Ukrainian and Moldovan United Methodists left the Eurasia Episcopal Area and joined the Nordic and Baltic Episcopal area.

The United Reformed Church has relationships with a number of small churches in both Ukraine and Russia, some directly and more through the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE). The CPCE condemned the Russian attack as a "breach of international law and a violation of human rights". The URC has particular links with the Transcarpathian Reformed Church of Ukraine, which has around 100 congregations, mainly in the west of the country.

How has the Baptist Church in Ukraine responded?

The Baptist Church has a significant presence in Ukraine with around 2,300 local congregations and approximately 110,000 members. The Baptist Theological Seminary reported that at least 400 churches have been lost in Ukraine since February 2022.¹⁸ Many pastors have been displaced from warzones and there are concerns about those left behind without spiritual leadership. The Ukrainian Baptist churches have played a key role in relief efforts in Ukraine, ranging from evacuation and resettlement to providing spiritual support.

Ecumenical relations in Europe and beyond

How have the Russian Orthodox Church in the UK responded?

In Great Britain and Ireland the Russian Orthodox Church, Diocese of Sourozh is a Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church - Moscow Patriarchate. The Church's membership have differing views on the invasion.¹⁹ A second Eastern Orthodox Church in the UK, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) Diocese of Great Britain and Eastern Europe²⁰, is self-governing church that is independent of the Russian Orthodox Church - Moscow Patriarchate but part of the Russian Orthodox family.

What international dialogue between churches is taking place?

Dialogue is taking place utilising a range of existing partner relationships and new initiatives. The World Council of Churches will use its forums as a space for dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church, rather than suspending it. The Vatican and the WCC²¹ both seek to assist in dialogue across the schism that has taken place between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church. The Russian Orthodox Church is being used by the Government of Russia as an organ of state and this places limitations on the nature of the dialogue than can take place.²² The

¹⁷ [A Declaration on the "Russian World" \(Russkii mir\) Teaching - Public Orthodoxy](#)

¹⁸ [Ukrainian Seminary President: 400 Baptist Churches Gone..... | News & Reporting | Christianity Today](#)

¹⁹ See the address of Fr Stephen Platt at the Church of England General Synod in July 2022 – page 77-78 [General Synod - Group of Sessions - July 2022 0.pdf \(churchofengland.org\)](#) See also a report of a discussion hosted by the Religion Media Centre [Religion at the heart of understanding Russia's claim on Ukraine News \(religionmediacentre.org.uk\)](#)

²⁰ [Russian Orthodox Diocese of Great Britain and Western Europe | Russian Orthodox Diocese of Great Britain and Western Europe \(orthodox-europe.org\)](#) - See report in the Church times '[Our first response must be prayer](#)' ([churchtimes.co.uk](#))

²¹ [WCC general secretary to Patriarch Kirill: "the war in Ukraine must come to an end" | World Council of Churches \(oikoumene.org\)](#) [Patriarch Kirill meets with delegation of the World Council of Churches. \(mospat.ru\)](#)

²² [Russian priest sanctioned for praying for peace \(cne.news\)](#)

Conference of European Churches has recently launched 'Pathways to Peace'²³ that is establishing dialogue on Ukraine across churches and with the European Union.

5. Responding through prayer, action and advocacy

The ongoing war and the absence of a clear way out can feel overwhelming for those of us at a distance. However, there are many ways in which we can respond.

Prayer

As people of faith, we believe that prayer has power. Even at a distance, we can continue to hold those caught in the conflict in our prayers, committing their safety to God, and pray for peace. For guidance, see the prayers from: the [Methodist Church](#); the [United Reformed Church](#); the [Baptist Union](#); [BMS World Mission](#) and [Christian Aid](#).

Giving

A number of humanitarian aid initiatives have been established to deliver immediate and urgent support to people in Ukraine and refugees in the surrounding countries. These include: [Christian Aid](#); [All We Can and the Methodist Church's Urgent Appeal](#) and [BMS World Mission](#).

The [Disasters Emergency Committee](#) is a coalition of over 15 aid organisations. Their appeal will be matched pound for pound by donations from the UK Government's funds.

Supporting refugees

Many of our members have become hosts through the UK government's Homes for Ukraine scheme. The Baptist Union and the Methodist Church have entered into partnerships with CitizensUK to provide more direct pathways to matching for our members.

While many have been successfully settled, the conflict continues to displace large numbers of people. To accommodate those who have yet to be welcomed, more households will have to open their homes. Can you be part of this? Could you raise the conversation in your church community, explore how you can support those who are able and willing to host, or could you host yourself? To help you, resources are available from [The Baptist Union](#) and the [Methodist Church](#).

Advocacy

There are steps the UK government could be taking to work more actively towards peace, such as:

1. Support the United Nations Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, initially by engaging as an observer at meetings of state parties; follow through on the UN Secretary General's New Agenda for Peace; and support a fourth UN General Assembly Special Session on Disarmament.
2. Raise the international development budget to at least 0.7% of Gross National Income, to comply with UN targets and restore a leadership position for the UK in tackling rising global inequality.
3. Increase support for conflict prevention by at least quadrupling the UK contribution to the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, reversing the recent downward trend.

Do consider writing to your MP to ask for the support of their party and the Government for these or other measures that you would like to see to further global peace and development goals.

²³ [Pathways to Peace: CEC to implement peace initiatives in Europe | CEC Europe](#)

Stay informed

The invasion of Ukraine is a contentious topic, and it can be difficult to navigate polarising narratives – especially on social media. Disinformation around Ukraine has been prevalent for many years, growing ever more sophisticated and dangerous. Indeed, misinformation is a crucial part of ensuring Russia’s domestic support for the war. In this context, reading reports and news from a variety of reliable sources is an important way to stay aware and informed about the conflict. The resources listed below are a starting point for this.

Further resources

World Council of Churches 11th Assembly, Karlsruhe, Germany (15 September 2022)

[War in Ukraine, Peace and Justice in the Europe Region | World Council of Churches \(oikoumene.org\)](#)

The Church of England General Synod Discussion Paper GS2259 ‘The War in Ukraine’ (June 2022)

[GS2259 War in Ukraine.pdf \(churchofengland.org\)](#)

Joint Public Issues Team – links to prayer resources

[How can we help Ukraine? \(jpit.uk\)](#)

The widely-supported Orthodox statement (13 March 2022)

[A Declaration on the “Russian World” \(Russkii mir\) Teaching - Public Orthodoxy](#)

Statement of Russian Christian Peacemakers against Russia’s military aggression (December 2022)

[Christmas Declaration 2022 \(christians4peace.com\)](#)

The Church and Peace; Statement on Division, War and Nonviolence (26 October 2022)

[2022 PR AGM and Int. Conference Church and Peace.docx \(church-and-peace.org\)](#)

Forum 18: on abuses of freedom of conscience in Ukraine and Russia

[Forum 18: UKRAINE: First known wartime conscientious objector jailing - 17 January 2023](#)

Archbishop Justin Welby interview (December 2022)

[Welby interviewed: ‘This is a just war, and the Ukrainians will hold out for a just peace’ \(churchtimes.co.uk\)](#)

Economist Intelligence. The war in Ukraine: Russia’s ruptured relations with the West. Geopolitics, supply chains and power dynamics in 2023 (2023)

<https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/russia-ukraine-outlook-2023/>