



Ukrainian Evangelicals Wait for the End

JILL NELSON

They yearn for peace and a good night's sleep but don't trust Donald Trump's proposed cease-fire.

Maia Mikhaluk feels as if she hasn't slept for three years. Not really. Not well.

The Russian air raids hit Kyiv at night. But she never knows which night. In the early days of the war, Mikhaluk and her husband rushed to a makeshift bomb shelter, a corridor between their apartment and their grown-up daughter's apartment.

Now, they just lie in bed and pray for protection from the Iranian-made Shahed drones, the North Korean-made Hwasong-11A missiles, and of course the Russian-made Novator Kalibr missiles, 9K720 Iskander missiles, and Kinzhal missiles.

Mikhaluk said the children in Kyiv can tell the difference between the different weapons systems based on the sound of the explosions.

Maia is tired. She is ready for peace.

She doesn't think President Donald Trump feels the same. She saw the video of him berating Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky for not being thankful enough and not accepting Russia's terms for peace. She heard him order Ukrainians to accept "a cease-fire right now" without any guarantees that Russia wouldn't violate the terms of peace again. It didn't seem to her that Trump was trying to end the war.

"It was not about peace," Mikhaluk told Christianity Today. "It was a power play."

The diplomatic meltdown at the White House may mark a critical turning point for the war. Ukraine has relied on American and European support since the 2022 invasion, fending off the Russian military, which is one of the largest militaries in the world, and surviving the bombs, blackouts, and dire shortages. But a few days after the Oval Office argument, Trump paused all military aid.

At the same time, Ukrainian Christians told CT that life goes on. They have their routines and establish a semblance of normalcy. Through it all, they put their trust in God.

"When the enemy is strong and even when allies betray, God is still in control," said Mikhaluk, a pastor's wife who has helped plant churches across Ukraine since 1997. **"We know he will not abandon the oppressed."**

Church can be a kind of ballast in the chaos, so many evangelical congregations have made significant adjustments to keep meeting.

Churches have started online services, which helps the people who have been displaced by war to stay connected. Churches have also installed generators, allowing the congregations to invite their neighbors to charge their phones, drink some tea, and hear the gospel.

Most still gather several times a week.

"They're still worshiping," said Jon Eide, who coordinates support for Ukrainian churches for Mission to the World. "They're still having Bible studies on Tuesday nights. Everything that we might think, Well, there's no use having that anymore."

In the southern city of Kherson, where the Dnipro River is the only barrier separating Ukrainians from Russian forces, Presbyterian pastor Vova Barishnev drives a van around to pick people up for church.

These days, however, his Sunday-morning routine starts when he switches on a drone-detecting device. He keeps it with him in the van, and if it goes off, he speeds to safety, ideally finding a spot under the cover of an overpass.

This is an upgrade from the pastor's previous method. He used to put his head out the window and scan the sky while driving.

"Look, if you can get a cease-fire right now, I tell you, you take it so the bullets stop flying and your men stop getting killed," Trump told Zelensky at the White House. The American president said a cease-fire would be "a d— good thing," and the Ukrainian Christians who spoke to CT agree.

But they also remember that their country gave up its nuclear weapons in 1994 in exchange for a promise for protection. The United States and Russia both agreed. But then Russia invaded anyway in 2014 and took part of Ukraine by force.

And they remember in 2015, Russia agreed to a cease-fire again. There was a 12-point deal, which included exchanging prisoners, withdrawing weapons, and respecting Ukrainian law in the annexed areas.

Russia didn't follow through on its commitments. The Moscow government preposterously claimed it wasn't even party to the agreement and then launched a full-scale invasion in 2022.

More than 46,000 Ukrainian soldiers have died since then. And more than 12,000 civilians.

Anna and Vasyl Feier knew some of the 290 people killed in the assault on Irpin, a suburb of Kyiv with a lot of evangelicals. It was once a hub of Christian ministry, sometimes jokingly called the "Wheaton of Ukraine."

"Everything was destroyed," Vasyl Feier said. "Businesses were destroyed, and our house was destroyed."

The Feier family fled in 2022 when the Russians invaded, making a run for the capital. They returned to Irpin after Ukrainian forces retook the city. They live in a temporary shelter and do their best with the constant interruptions of the war. Air-raid sirens disrupt sleep at night and work during the day. Their three kids, 4, 7, and 15, spend hours in the bomb shelters.

They would like to rebuild their home. But they just have to wait until the war is over.

"It's very hard to plan things," Vasyl Feier said. "Every day we don't know if we will be alive tomorrow or not."

This is normal now. It's hard to sleep. You watch the sky for drones. Your children learn to distinguish the sounds of explosions. You don't make big plans. And you wait while American leaders talk loudly about a cease-fire that you couldn't personally take seriously.

"When you live in a war zone, your every moment can be the last one," said Mikhaluk in Kyiv. "It makes you want to focus on what is important—on sharing the message of hope, the gospel, with as many people as possible."

[Give to UKRAINE CRISIS](#)