

**Meghan Mast:** *If you've been following the war in Ukraine, you'll know that over the last week the Russian military has been launching large-scale missile attacks on cities across Ukraine, including Kyiv and Zaporizhzhia. The latest shelling has killed and injured dozens of people and led to widespread damage to civilian areas.*

*Because of the escalation in the war, our partners in the impacted areas have had to cease work for a time. I know many supporters of MCC have a soft spot, maybe even a personal connection, to Ukraine. Especially to the areas of Zaporizhzhia and Chortitza where MCC has deep historical roots.*

*Maybe you're watching closely. Maybe you're wondering about the safety and well-being of MCC staff and partners in the area.*

*We are too.*

*Today on the show, I check in with MCC partner Max. We're only using his first name for security reasons.*

*I wanted to check in and see how he's doing and hear what he's seeing on the ground.*

*I'm Meghan Mast and you're listening to "Relief, development and podcast," a production of Mennonite Central Committee.*

*(MUSIC FADES UP AND THEN DOWN)*

*Our guest today is Max . He is the program director for an MCC partner in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine.*

*Welcome, Max.*

**Max:** Yeah. Hello Meghan.

**Meghan:** First of all, how are you doing? Are you safe right now? And is your family safe?

**Max:** I'm in a safe location. Thank you for asking. Yeah, here in Ukraine, we say it's relatively safe. But it's pretty safe for now.

**Meghan:** And can you describe what the last few days and weeks have been like? What are you seeing?

**Max:** Well, for us here in Zaporizhzhia, the last few weeks were quite difficult. Because over here, we began to receive more missile attacks than before that, so we have sleepless nights. And every night you hear the missiles arriving, landing somewhere in the city, you know that it's probably some people die. Buildings being destroyed. So it's been pretty hard.

**Meghan:** Yeah, I mean, I can't imagine. Are the missile attacks, they're usually happening at night.

**Max:** Yes. 90%. And it happen 1am, 2am, 4am, 5am. Usually, everybody wake up. It's almost a million people who live in the city of Zaporizhzhia. Probably a little bit less now with people now being away/got evacuated, but still it's a huge number of people that wake up, and you don't know where the next one will arrive. So you hear the first boom. And then you think, okay, where is going to be the next one? It's going to be close. Or far, will any of friends suffer or relatives. And you start chatting with one another. So and then you can't sleep after that.

**Meghan:** And what are you seeing during the daytime?

**Max:** During the daytime, it's more or less, I can't say peaceful...it's more or less safe, I would say. Well, probably safe is not the right word, because you hear alarms all the time. It's warning that somewhere a missile is flying close to us. And they give these warnings by regions, so Zaporizhzhia region or neighboring regions to other regions. So the stores close, most of the stores close, at least they're supposed to. And people are urged to go to a bomb shelter. Some people do go, some don't. But at any rate, life is very different at night and during the day.

**Meghan:** Are there places that you are familiar with that have been impacted and look very different now?

**Max:** Yes, unfortunately, one of missiles hit a place, its apartment building about 300 meters from our church, actually even less, at night. And it looks very different now, this apartment building, there were people who got killed, got injured. That's one of the reasons we decided to not to meet at the church two Sundays ago.

**Meghan:** And how are you staying in touch with other people who are also helping during this crisis, including other MCC partners?

**Max:** Well, we communicate by phone, by emails or messengers. And there are various groups in messengers, those who help others. So we try to be in touch to see who is helping others. For example, our shelter is part of a shelter association in Zaporizhzhia. So we know what's happening with other shelters, sometimes you can redirect people. And by the way, we had to close a shelter as well, very unfortunate, about 10 days ago or so, when that missile got very close to our ministry place, we felt for safety reasons, we need to let our staff leave and people not stay there. And we're not the only one shelter who decided to temporarily close, I hope very much it's temporary because the need is huge. And people do need place to live.

**Meghan:** Wow, and that's obviously impacted the work that you're doing having that shelter close, or what are some of the other ways that the work that you're doing has been impacted?

**Max:** I would say the main ministry we've been doing is hosting people in the shelter. We've hosted, in six months, about 700 people. It's a temporary host, temporary shelter, like for a few days only. So had to put that on pause. With humanitarian aid, it's, it's, a little bit on pause now. I mean, the main reason is we just let our team take a break. Some of them left, some of them are staying, left temporarily for a few weeks, is really a temporary measure. Although we don't know. I mean, we're making decisions here day by day. So we can't make plans long term plans. That's very unfortunate. But that's how life is here.

So about 10 days or so, we decided to pause almost everything we're doing in Zaporizhzhia and wait a couple of weeks to see where all this is going. And that's very unfortunate, because the need is huge. And the ministry team here is eager to work and help with the needs. But we decided that it's better to wait. We've been helping, you know, half a year. So it's okay to wait two weeks, just to keep the team safe. And just to be able to take this little break, ministry break. So I would say we're not functioning at the moment, we're not functioning with humanitarian aid, which is, as I said, very unfortunate, because the need is huge. And we hope very much to resume everything we've been doing by the end of this month. God will show us. God knows what will happen.

**Meghan:** As you mentioned earlier, and as is very obvious for any of us to paying attention to what's happening in Ukraine and including where you are right now in Zaporizhzhia, it's been such a difficult time. And as you mentioned, a lot of people have left Zaporizhzhia, but you haven't. What's motivating you to keep going?

**Max:** Well in the beginning of the war, end of February, we were in Zaporizhzhia, myself and my wife and we decided we would stay here until it gets impossible to stay here. So it's been possible to stay here till now. We moved to a more safe place, you know we have an apartment downtown which is very unsafe in the city so we're able to move to our cabin outside of the city. So we feel a bit more safe here. And then most men stayed, because men are not allowed to leave Ukraine because of military condition. And yeah, those who stayed, we were in touch with one another, just talking about our church now, church community. And some people, families, moved to Western Ukraine as a family. But those who stayed we just continued as a church as people who know one another and support one another. And personally, I asked my wife if she wants to go to a safer place. Because she could leave anytime. And the answer was, she wants to be in Ukraine when victory happens. And I really admire that. That's one of the reasons. Yeah, we want to be here to celebrate the victory. And we believe and hope it's gonna happen. Sure. The sooner the better. So that's why we're staying here.

**Meghan:** And what would it take for, you mentioned that you're in a safer area right now outside of the city, and you and your wife had decided that you're going to stay for as long as it's possible to stay. What would it take for you to leave?

**Max:** There have been speculations about using the nuclear weapon, and we're actually located about 60 kilometers away from Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. So that would be one of the reasons to leave if anything really bad happens, then everybody will leave. So we will not be an exception. If Zaporizhzhia gets occupied, that will be a clear sign for us, which I hope will never happen. And we're praying about that. And asking all our friends to pray that Zaporizhzhia does not get occupied by the Russians. So we can keep staying here, keep ministering here. Just keep being at our home, this is our home.

**Meghan:** And that starts to answer the next question that I had, which is how can people in the United States and Canada pray for you and others in your community?

**Max:** Definitely. Pray for peace. But specifically, we pray that God would forbid the Russians to use any nuclear weapon or use our power plant for anything bad reason. So pray about that specifically. Also pray about restoration. I've been asking others to pray about this, because places already began to get restored, like around Kyiv area and other areas. And I'm pretty sure now, after all of this ends, there'll be lots of work restoring places, but also, please pray for the restoration of people. It's going to take much longer to help them forget what they've seen, what they've heard, what they experienced. But I know with God, it's possible. And as a ministry, you know, we want to be part of the process. And we invite

our friends and partners to be part of that process, restoring the people so that they can restore mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. And through that process, learn about Jesus, learn about God's love.

**Meghan:** And what message would you like to give to our listeners in Canada and the United States right now?

**Max:** I want to thank everybody who has been praying for Ukraine, who has been supporting Ukraine and ministries here in Ukraine. So, thank you for your support. It's very important for us to know that we are not abandoned, that we have friends and partners who care about us, about our land.

**Meghan:** Well, thanks for speaking with me, Max. And we're thinking about you so much in Ukraine right now.

**Max:** Yeah thank you Meghan, and I hope this can help others in Canada to keep thinking about Ukraine and keep praying.

**Meghan:** *That was Max, program director for an MCC partner in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine*

*There are many different ways you can respond to what's happening in Ukraine.*

*I'll include a link to our website with more information, in the show notes.*

*This episode of Relief, Development and Podcast was recorded and produced on Treaty 1 territory, the original land of the Anishinaabeg, Cree and Dakota peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation.*

*This episode was produced and hosted by me, Meghan Mast. The head producer is Emily Loewen.*

*A lot is happening in the world right now. This is a difficult time for many. May you experience God's provision and protection as we work together to share God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ.*

*Thanks and take good care.*

*(MUSIC FADES UP AND THEN DOWN)*

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SHOW NOTES:

To learn more about how MCC is responding to the war in Ukraine, or to learn how you can help, please visit: <https://mcccanada.ca/stories/crisis-ukraine>