

MUSIC: Easter bread blessing service at the Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral of St. Volodymyr in Manhattan

LUCY GRINDON, BYLINE:

Last Sunday was Easter for Ukrainian Orthodox Christians. People all over the world have been watching the war in Ukraine, and trying to figure out what they can do to help. There's one community, halfway around the world from the conflict, that's taking extraordinary steps to support Ukrainians.

Outside of Ukraine and Russia, *Canada* is home to the largest population of Ukrainians in the world. More than a hundred years ago, the Canadian government recruited Ukrainians specifically to farm the cold Canadian prairie. And today, the city of Edmonton is home to almost 100,000 Ukrainian-Canadians.

Since the start of the war, Edmonton's Ukrainian community has rallied, supporting the war effort and welcoming new immigrants. Ukrainian Church groups are particularly active. I traveled to Edmonton to report on the efforts of one church.

AIRPORT AMBI

When you head to baggage claim at the Edmonton airport, the first thing you see is a table decked out with blue and yellow balloons. Volunteers at the booth wait around the clock to greet new arrivals from Ukraine. Around 300 have arrived in Edmonton since the war began. Late on a recent Sunday night, Yaroslav Kostuk arrives to meet his sister and her daughter. There's a pile of stuffed animals at the booth. Kostuk picks out a polar bear. He hasn't seen his sister in five years. A woman and a small girl come through the doors, and he rushes up to them and hugs them. Ivan Lypovyk, the volunteer at the booth, stands back and watches.

IVAN LYPOVYK: That's a family

GRINDON: Kostuk hands his niece the polar bear, and he points to Lypovyk. The little girl runs up to Lypovyk, and gives him a hug.

LYPOVYK: Privyet! (Hi!)

GRINDON: She says thank you in Ukrainian:

LITTLE GIRL: Dyakayu (Thank you!)

GRINDON: And she heads with her mom and her uncle off to baggage claim.

Iryna Polishchuk arrived in Edmonton two weeks ago. She recalls the moment at the airport when she first saw the welcoming volunteers.

IRYNA POLISHCHUK: For a refugee, the people who are meeting you at the airport, at any place where they arrive, they are the most important people at that moment, like parents to a child, a frightened child.

GRINDON: Iryna Kravetz-Kuzmicz is the president of the Ukrainian Women's Organization in Edmonton. She also attends St. John's Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral, and volunteers to greet new arrivals at the airport. She says the work has become a central part of her life.

IRYNA KRAVETZ-KUZMICZ: I'm almost every day there, and at this point, I can say, my life, it's completely changed.

GRINDON: Many of the other volunteers at the airport booth are also members of St. John's Cathedral. It's the largest Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Edmonton. In the last few months, the Cathedral has become a focus of aid both to Ukraine and to new arrivals fleeing the war.

Fr. Cornell Zubritsky, one of the cathedral's priests, recalls the night these efforts began. February 24th, he turned on the TV to see if the war in Ukraine had started, and he saw reports of shelling.

CORNELL ZUBRITSKY: I said to my wife, you know, I better go to church, and I better open up the cathedral, because there may be people who will want to just come by and pray. They're going to want to come by and just be with someone else. They don't want to be alone. So I just put my coat on, and by the time I got here, there was already one family in front of the church waiting to get in.

GRINDON: In the weeks since, many have come to the Cathedral to pray, but also to plan and organize.

In the corner of the church basement, there's a pile of donated suitcases. Soon they'll be packed with medical supplies and carried by volunteers to Poland, and then delivered to Ukraine. As Fr. Zubritsky explains, it's the fastest and most reliable way to get the supplies where they're needed.

ZUBRITSKY: Most of this stuff ends up going to either field hospitals or hospitals in cities where they're just running short of even basic things like Tylenol for pain control. So this is just generic Costco acetaminophen tablets, that's a big box. And then we have some gauze. And this is, I think, a cold pack. And then of course you have kits for soldiers. Those have been requested, the first aid kits.

GRINDON: As we're heading back up the stairs, we run into Petro Motyka, the cathedral's caretaker. He says he hopes to help transport the medical supplies.

GRINDON: So, you're thinking about going to Poland to take some of the suitcases?

MOTYKA: Yeah, I have a dream to help Ukrainian people actually, because I am originally from Ukraine.

GRINDON: The next morning is Palm Sunday. After church, Solomiya Cherkavska and her father head to a small classroom in the basement. Cherkavska has been helping with the packing and shipping of medical supplies, but her day job is teaching kindergarten. She's planning to start a daycare center here at the church for newly-arrived Ukrainian kids, so she needs to figure out the classroom's capacity. It used to be a preschool, so it's already equipped with tiny tables for little kids.

SOLOMIYA CHERKAVSKA: Tata is measuring this room so we know how many kids we can place here, because there are so many regulations that we have to adhere to.
EXCHANGE IN UKRAINIAN
MEASURING TAPE SOUND

GRINDON: Most of Cherkavska's family and friends are still in Ukraine. She says the relief work helps her feel less powerless in the face of the war, no matter how much time it takes.

CHERKAVSKA: My husband is saying that he almost never sees me (laughs), so it's kind of sad because it's also a sacrifice. And, you know, I don't know how long I can keep going like this, but I also know that I'm not in this by myself. It's like a beehive. And we are all working towards one cause. And, you know, I'm this little bee, who is doing something, and it makes me feel good. It helps me keep going through this horror time in the history of my country and in my life. I don't know what I would—what I would *do* if I didn't have this.

GRINDON: Cherkavska says it'll take a few months to get the daycare center up and running. When it does open, they'll welcome Ukrainian kids and also provide jobs for immigrant women. Next week, a volunteer will carry another round of medical supplies back to Ukraine.

Lucy Grindon, Columbia Radio News.