

## **‘Open up our homes!’**

### **Ten reflections on Christian social engagement in light of the war in Ukraine.**

We are all shocked, saddened and concerned about the war in Ukraine. It has already cost the lives of hundreds of people so far and displaced millions. Our hearts break for the people of Ukraine and the millions who will suffer as a result of this conflict.

The response by the Methodist Church in Ireland to what is happening in Ukraine and the resulting humanitarian crisis there and in surrounding countries is through our World Development and Relief department. If you haven't already responded through what WDR has highlighted, please do so. And the Methodist Church in Ireland has called on Christians to pray. Please commit to continued prayer for Ukraine, for the war to be stopped and for all affected by this war.

In Ireland, we may feel helpless. However, we can respond within society in Ireland and we offer some reflections at this time.

1. We are against war. It stands directly against the way of Jesus Christ. We see in the war in Ukraine that the decisions of those in power serve to bring suffering to millions of ordinary people. President Putin is utterly wrong to invade a sovereign independent country. It is a senseless, cruel and evil act of aggression. A country's security interests must be earthed in treaties and in bodies that support international co-operation. We recognise that any country needs its means for defence, but extreme militarisation has brought intense suffering and colossal loss of life throughout the decades.
2. We support all the efforts being exercised by many people throughout Ireland to respond to the needs of those who are displaced or in need in other ways as a result of the war. Many charities or quickly organised groups of people, in and outside of church circles are responding, and we commend these. However, there may be limits to the extent of physical donations and the practicalities and costs involved. Trusted agencies with partners on the ground in eastern Europe are best able to respond. And so that is why we encourage financial giving, as is being operated through WDR.
3. The sudden refugee crisis prompted by this war should be of immense concern to countries well beyond those bordering Ukraine. In Ireland we are at the edge of Europe and so in some ways are shielded from the immediate impact of this crisis.  
We are of course deeply aware of our own history and the needs of our ancestors when they needed support and refuge. Importantly, as followers of Jesus, we recognise what lies at the heart of Christ's ministry and the persistent call of scripture to care for those who are most vulnerable and in need. Therefore, we need to seek locally and at government level to respond as well as we can.
4. It is crucial that we recognise that there are refugee crises beyond Ukraine. The challenges being faced that prompt people to flee from Middle Eastern and East African countries in particular remain. Millions have been displaced as a result of conflict, famine, persecution and the unsustainability of their livelihoods and land. Thousands at present are making extremely dangerous journeys through deserts, lawless territory and seas or are stranded in places with little help.  
We warn against any narratives or thinking that suggests that white Ukrainians, with lifestyles that we might potentially identify with a bit more easily, are any more deserving of help than those who may be of other ethnicities, religions or cultures. We always need to maintain a Christ-centred understanding of our neighbour.
5. The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland need to be places that play our part well in supporting the need for people to have refuge and to seek Asylum. The crisis prompted by the war in Ukraine should not lessen our commitment to others. Six months ago we were aware of the crisis prompted by the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. And stories that dominate our news headlines tend to provoke the greatest empathy from us. However the slow heart-breaking journeys of teenagers from Sudan fleeing conscription to militias, the Kurdish families without safe home or the central African man fleeing persecution for his faith never hit the headlines.

While our nations will have particular restraints on the capacity to respond to the various needs of our world, government response must not be populist and must respect the needs and dignity of all, while also being wholehearted in response to the crisis brought about by war in Ukraine.

6. The Republic of Ireland has persistently been failed by government policy for decades that has led to the housing crisis. The harsh consequences of it are being felt day by day by millions. We are greatly troubled by that crisis and are critical about how it has come about and its consequences for everyone involved. There is also concern about a developing housing crisis in Northern Ireland.  
While housing isn't our particular focus in this article, it does however, expose the limitations we are left with in responding appropriately to the housing needs of people who have sought refuge in Ireland. Too many Asylum seekers are currently being housed in hotels as a result. The housing crisis is not only a disaster for Irish people, but is a stumbling block in us fulfilling our international humanitarian obligations, and sadly, turned into an excuse by those who wouldn't want us to fulfil them.
7. This is now where it hits home for many ordinary Methodists. We need to open up our own homes! Of course there are many reasons why this may not be within the ability of many people, from simple practicalities to the vulnerability of people in the household.  
However, overall as church members we must recognise that we are far too protective about our spaces. Our need for comfort and space has too often excused our decadence in a world of need. We are so immersed in a culture of individualism that we forget our responsibility to our neighbour. We have over-spiritualised Jesus' teaching on the storing up of possessions and forgotten that how we actually use our most valuable possessions speaks about where our hearts really lie. We have denigrated Christian hospitality to be about fine dinner parties instead of our response to genuine need. What could God be calling us to now?  
There are Irish Methodists who at different times in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have known the pain of having to flee from what we knew as home in one place to safety at another location. The people of Ukraine for the most part did not believe this trouble was going to come upon them, even a few weeks ago. Who's to say that war or conflict will not come to Ireland again in the coming decades? Is now the time to be more prophetic in how we view our home?
8. This is a time of immense financial strain for many. Household bills and fuels costs are rising rapidly. And it is likely that as a result of the war and Russia's isolation, costs will get more severe. It is right that our nations play our part in the consequences of needed sanctions. However, many in society here are forced into 'heat or eat' or other difficult choices. These things underline our need to support all in society who are most affected by the rise in living costs here.
9. These challenges along with our awareness of the war in Ukraine and its consequences challenge us and should do so. However, we also need to look after the peace of our minds. There may be a time to limit our news consumption and be reminded that the followers of Jesus enjoy and are to depend on the peace of God in all circumstances.
10. In all of what has been highlighted here, we need to finish with underlining what 'home' is – a place of safety, nurture and health. A welcoming home should not be a source of undermining our mental or physical health. And as we've highlighted elsewhere in regard to domestic abuse, all need to live in spaces with safety and security. However, there are many without that place to call home – and we can play our part.

### Summary

1. War is against God's way.
2. Give as you can to those in desperate need.
3. The refugee is at the heart of God's compassion.
4. People of all racial backgrounds need help.
5. Our governments must play their part in providing refuge.
6. The housing crisis is a stumbling block in us fulfilling our international humanitarian obligations.
7. We need to open our own homes.
8. Support those most affected by high energy costs.
9. Look after our own minds.
10. What is home?