



Resources for Worship, Education & Action



## An invitation to stand in solidarity with Ukraine

This resource includes a Godly play story, a brief history of events that led to the war in Ukraine from mission co-worker Ellen Smith, a story about one of Ukraine's favorite foods with a recipe to try, and an introduction to one Presbyterian Disaster Assistance partner in the region working with refugees. Please reference Resource #1 for other resources including a special peace candle lighting liturgy.



# For Worship

*The following story was written in the format and style of Godly Play. The Godly Play® method is a curriculum of spiritual practice and storytelling to explore the mystery of God's presence in our lives. For more context and information about how to implement Godly play, [read here](#).*



## Yuriy Lifanse – A story written in the Godly Play style

### Sources:

[The Commitment is Unquestionable](#). An update from Ellen Smith, mission co-worker serving in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Poland. Ukrainian faith leader and displaced person named as Presbyterian Peacemaker [Yuriy Lifanse](#) will share about ministering during war.

### Lesson Notes:

Focus: The life of Yuriy Lifanse. The idea that God is everywhere, even in places of conflict and struggle, and uses normal people like you and me to do God's work.

This lesson highlights some of the life of Yuriy Lifanse and his work with the Community of Sant'Egidio, an international lay Catholic association committed to social service.

### Materials:

One basket with:  
Brown underlay  
Black felt strips (to lay into peace sign)  
Yuriy Lifanse figure  
Candle from Holy Baptism story  
Metal chain  
Stuffed felt heart  
Scroll



### **Movement**

*Find the Yuriy Lifanse story basket on the Pentecost and Heroes Shelf.*

*As you speak, gesture to the children seated on the floor.*

*Hold up and show the picture of Yuri, then set it down again and pause. Then lay underlay. On the underlay, unroll the black felt path, with the center path pointing to you, and the three paths toward the children.*

*Place the baptism candle at the top of the path closest to you.*

*Walk the Yuriy figure to the center. Place the heart on the path.*

*Move Yuriy down the left path and place the scroll on the path.*

*Walk Yuriy back to the center then down the right path. Place the chain between the two paths.*

### **Words**

Watch where I go to get this story.

Look around the circle. You see a circle of friends. Did you know that there are more people in this circle than you can see?! They come to join us from the whole story of the Christian people.

Today our story is about a man named Yuriy Lifanse and his country, Ukraine.

Yuriy was born on Jan. 16, 1976, in a city called Kyiv in Ukraine. At the time of his birth, Ukraine was a part of the USSR. The USSR did not allow its people to worship God or practice any religion. But even though it was against the law, there were many people who still worshiped God, and Yuriy was secretly baptized at birth. In 1991, when Yuriy was 15, the USSR broke apart and the people of Ukraine were allowed to worship who and how they wanted.

Yuriy met the Community of Sant'Egidio and began his journey of prayer, service and peace. His classmates would gather and pray and then put their prayers into action, doing the work to help the people they prayed for. One of his first ministries was in a miserable boarding school where over 400 children lived. He prayed with them and helped them. When Yuriy finished school, inspired by one of his teachers, he decided to become a professor himself.

Yuriy became a professor of Italian language, but he continued to be a part of the Community of Sant'Edigio and became one of their leaders, continuing their work of prayer and serving the poor, orphaned, elderly and lonely.

In February 2022, Ukraine was invaded by Russia, who thought Ukraine should be under their control, and the country was suddenly at war. Yuriy was forced to flee his home in Kyiv, to another city called Lviv.





*Move the heart to the right path with Yuriy.*

Even though Yuriy had to leave his home, he knew God wanted him to help people. In Lviv, Yuriy directs the Community of Sant'Edigio, developing a program to help others who have had to flee their homes, sending trucks with food and medicine to the people close to the war who can't leave, and opening a center where those who need help have a place to go.

*Touch the heart.*

Yuriy said, "War is the time to fully understand how God cares about us. The Word of God gives words, feelings, gives an opportunity to understand more deeply what is happening to us. In tragic times, serving another person gives strength and hope to look to the future."

*Pause in silence for a moment, then being the wondering. Pause after each question, giving plenty of time for children to respond.*

We honor Yuriy because his love for God and desire to care for God's people inspired others to do the same. I wonder what parts of Yuriy's story you like best.

I wonder what part of the story is most important.

I wonder what part of the story is about you, or where you might be in the story.

I wonder if we could leave any part out and still have all that we need.

I wonder what your work will be today. During work time, you may work with this story, or any of our other stories.

*As you narrate, put the pieces back in the basket neatly. Be sure to roll up the path and fold the underlay. Place all the material in the basket, then return the basket to its proper place.*

For now, let me show you how to put this story away. Here is the candle representing Yuriy's baptism. Here is the heart representing God's love. Here is the scroll showing Yuriy's time teaching. Here is the chain showing Yuriy and many others having to leave their homes. And here is Yuriy.

*Dismiss the children one by one to begin their work.*

Now, what would you like to work with today?



*The author, educator Tracy Caruso, serves as director of Children and Family Ministries at St. James Presbyterian Church in Bellingham, Washington.*



# For Education

## An introduction to the war in Ukraine

A conversation with PC(USA) Regional Liaison for Eastern Europe Ellen Smith.

On Feb. 24, 2022, Russian leaders initiated a war that has taken an estimated hundreds of thousands of lives in Ukraine. Additionally, around 8 million people have been internally displaced, and it is estimated that an equal number are seeking refuge in other countries. This document seeks to provide an answer to the question: What led to the war in Ukraine? This conversation seeks to provide background and deepen the reader's understanding of Ukraine from the perspective of our mission co-worker Ellen Smith. We also encourage you to reference Human Rights Watch and other sources.



## Ukraine: The past is present

*Question: Tell us a little about Ukrainian identity and their historic relationship with Russia.*

Ukraine has always had a national character, a feistiness, and a view to the West, which was at odds with authoritarian Soviet structures and policies. They have abundant agricultural land and rich coal mines in the Donbas region, providing some influence and power. During the years under the Soviet Union, Ukraine had a greater inner freedom, which expressed itself in more vibrant churches and cultural institutions in comparison with those denominations under the direct repression of Soviet leadership.

We will need to look back nearly 100 years to provide some context for the current war.

## The Bolshevik years: Ukraine struggles for independence from Russia: Executions, deportation and starvation

*Question: What happened a hundred years ago that created distrust and tension?*

From 1926–1932, Stalin and his cohort, known as the Bolsheviks, attacked the proud Ukrainian spirit through the intelligentsia and the clergy in Ukraine, either by execution or by deportation to Siberia. The Tatars of Crimea, a Turkic minority that inhabited the Crimean Peninsula, were also deported, largely to Central Asia. Next, the Bolsheviks turned on the peasantry who resisted collectivization and re-education. After two years of widespread crop failures and resulting hunger in 1931 and 1932, the Soviets increased the grain tax, mostly to sell the grain on the world market for hard currency as they sought to industrialize.

The borders between Russia and Ukraine were closed so that starving refugees could not leave the country. A blacklist was introduced against opposing peasants, and food demands on the farmers were drastically increased. The resulting mass starvation is remembered as the Holodomor. Three to 7 million people died. The forced collectivization took place in Russia as well, and peasants with more independent spirits were labeled Kulaks and sent to Siberia, but Russia did not experience the mass starvation. This neglect and abuse created deeper disdain for Russia and its leadership.



## The Cold War: 1947–1991

*Question: How did the Cold War impact the relationship between Ukraine and the USSR in relation to Ukraine sovereignty?*

Ukraine had no sovereignty under the USSR. It was a constituent republic. Decisions were made in Moscow. Invariably, critical resources went to Moscow. There were advantages of being further away from Moscow, as Ukraine had more cultural and religious expression. They did not, however, have political sovereignty. So, when the USSR was eventually dissolved, Ukraine became an independent nation.

## Government neglect: Russian response to the Chernobyl power plant meltdown

*Question: What impact did the Chernobyl meltdown have on Ukraine?*

In 1986, when the Chernobyl nuclear power plant experienced a meltdown, the Soviets sought to hide the incident from the world and from their own people. The authorities did not issue iodine tablets to combat the absorption of radiation, although they could have. In fact, as the clouds moved toward Moscow, they seeded them, so that the nuclear toxin would rain there and not reach Moscow. Ukraine had no information about this, and often held outdoor festivals, with no knowledge of the toxicity they were being subjected to. It was not only Ukraine that suffered, but the lack of transparency and basic human respect created animosity and increased internal divisiveness toward Russia.

## The fall of the USSR, Dec. 26, 1991

*Question: What impact did the dissolution of the USSR have on Ukraine?*

The collapse of the Soviet Union was chaotic for everyone. Politically, Ukraine had somewhat more freedom to operate, but they were still right next door to a large nuclear power. The nuclear weapons that had been located in Ukraine were moved back to Russia with the the Budapest Memorandum, an agreement in which Ukraine gave up their nuclear weapons in exchange for territorial integrity. The United States actively supported this, and it was a serious point of contention for Russia.

Additionally, Ukraine lost guaranteed markets for their industrial goods and resources. The corruption that had existed in the Soviet Union continued in the new state of Ukraine. State assets ended up being privatized to people with influence, just like in Russia after the USSR's collapse. Ordinary people suffered, and there were those that thought they were better off aligned with Russia than with the west.

## The 2004 Orange Revolution, poisoning and illegal polling

*Question: What was the Orange Revolution and what impact did the protests have?*

In the fall of 2004, a series of mostly nonviolent protests took place after a messy multi-election process where Ukraine eventually voted to install reformist candidate, Viktor Yushchenko, as president. Viktor Yanukovich, the incumbent president, was closely allied with Russia. This became known as the Orange Revolution because protestors wore orange, Yushchenko's campaign branding color. There were acts of civil disobedience, sit-ins, and strikes. In the first round, no candidate received the required 50% majority. In the runoff, the official election results were notably different from exit polls. The Donbas region, a historically more pro-Russian region, had over 100% voter turn-out with assistance from Russia, which included falsified voter papers. Evidence showed that Yanukovich's campaign staff had tampered with the results. Mass nonviolent and democratic-styled protests ensued and were effective in securing a democratically elected leader. The success of the revolution was startling for Russia and perceived as a threat to President Vladimir Putin's leadership. A new election was held in Ukraine in December 2004, which Yushchenko clearly won. However, Yanukovich returned to power in 2010 with help from voters in the Donbas region, aided by

the support of Russian loyalists in the Dunbas region.

## The 2012 Maidan Revolution (the Revolution of Dignity)

*Question: Ukraine has wanted to join the European Union for some time. How was that perceived by Russia and what was the impact of the Maidan Revolution?*

In March 2012, the European Union and Ukraine announced that they were negotiating an Association Agreement. President Yanukovich, in reaction to pressure from Russia to quell it, withdrew his willingness to sign this planned agreement. The path to the Maidan Revolution (now known as the Revolution of Dignity) began to take shape in response. Other factors leading to the violence in Maidan square in Kyiv included Russia's pressure on Ukraine to join the Customs Union between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, and trade sanctions were imposed by Russia in August 2013. Additionally, there was high unemployment, a broken system of medical care and rampant corruption at all levels of the state. The deep frustration within Ukrainian society was primed to explode. Yet, protests beginning in the fall of 2013 were peaceful. However, excessive use of force by police to break up the early protests in November 2013 led to the use of violent forms of protest. Ultimately, 100 young people died.

Additionally, Russia accused the west of interfering in the Maidan Revolution. For Russia, western interference in Ukraine was a line that should not be crossed. Ukraine, however, had been ready to leave Russia's sphere of influence and come under EU membership and NATO protection. U.S. diplomacy failed during this time, with no response when Russia invaded Georgia, nor when Russia supported rebels in the Donbas region. U.S. political and media rhetoric contributed to a huge diplomatic failure and further compromised international relationships.

## The 2014 Annexation of Crimea

One of the more interesting events that lead up to the war in Ukraine occurred in the aftermath of the Maidan Revolution. Soldiers with no identifying insignia invaded Crimea. Within a couple of weeks Crimea was overtaken by "little green men" who spoke Russian. Russia feigned innocence, calling them "local self-defense forces." In time, they admitted that these were indeed special forces from Russia. Russia had covertly taken over Crimea. A referendum within Crimea was held. The results revealed that Crimea wanted to be part of the Russian Federation. This was highly suspicious to Ukraine and other allies.

In 2022 when Russia invaded Ukraine, it was clear that Russia's seizure of southern Ukraine had been planned as a lead up to their full-scale invasion. As Ukraine continued to move closer to western policies and practices, especially as they attempted to join the European Union and NATO, Russia escalated their attempts to control Ukraine and squash their spirit.

### Editorial Note

It is a daunting effort to summarize a complicated war in a few paragraphs. We rely on our partners in Ukraine and Russia to inform our opinions, as well as PC(USA) policies and principles.

For more information, contact [ellen.smith@pcusa.org](mailto:ellen.smith@pcusa.org)



## For Action

### Adele's pierogies: A story of immigration, a Presbyterian granddaughter and a nation's food

Making Ukrainian pierogies is a laborious process, and it needs to be done right. At least that is what Sophie's grandma taught her.

Learning how to crimp the edges correctly took attention, practice and skill. As a child, Sophie understood how important pierogies were in her family story and remembers waiting until Grandma Adele was sure Sophie was ready for the responsibility. According to Grandma, they were the "best pierogies on earth." When the time did come, Sophie was showered in praise, love and more than a little direction.



But that was Adele Solonyenko. As the youngest of 16 children, she grew up on a working farm in Saskatchewan. Adele had an intensity about everything she did, and often seemed on guard. Her parents had emigrated separately from Poland and Austria, driven by persecution and disease in eastern Europe. So, Adele grew up in Canada speaking Ukrainian and French, working on her family's farm, and scrambling for attention. She had an indomitable spirit and was more than a little fierce. She overcame cancer as a young, single mom and wore her emotions on her sleeve. And most importantly, she fiercely loved her grandchildren.

"Her dad wasn't good to her," says Sophie, explaining a particular childhood incident in which Adele may have tossed a pitchfork in his direction after a disagreement. Eventually, when Adele was a teen, she and an older sister packed up their hearts and hopes and emigrated to the U.S. There Adele became a hairdresser and married and birthed her two children, Clover and Darren. Later came the grandbabies, including Sophie.

Sophie attributes her connection to her Ukrainian heritage partly to Adele's scrupulous attention to the process and outcome of "the best pierogies on earth." Adele passed this forward to her children and grandchildren, including that dogged attention to detail. Sophie reflects, "Now when Eric (Sophie's husband) and I make pierogies, I'm worried about wanting them to be done right." The stamina and attention it requires to crimp the edges just right stays with her when they make this special family recipe. As does her grandmother.

Although Adele passed away in 2020, in 2022, Sophie married a man whose family had their own history of pierogies. To say that one could hear Adele's memorable accent drifting through the ceremony would be an understatement for those who knew her. And there is little doubt she would have been proud of the delicious pierogies shared at the reception. (The recipe Grandma used is on page 9, although you may want to use this one: [Ukrainian pierogi recipe](#).)

*Sophie Beal is a recent graduate of Harvard Divinity School and is certified ready for a call as a teaching elder with the PC(USA). For a more detailed Ukrainian recipe and assembly, check out [Ukrainian pierogies for beginners](#).*

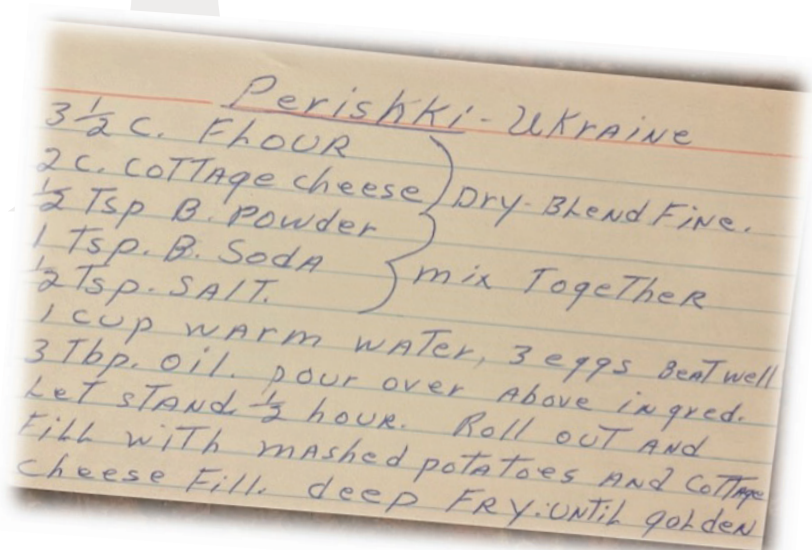


## Have a pierogi party!

We know and appreciate other cultures partly through their food. Ukrainian pierogies (perogies or varenyky) are a traditional dish of filled dumplings. They are made by wrapping unleavened dough around a filling and shaped into a crescent and can be savory or sweet. Typical fillings include potato, cheese, sauerkraut, ground meat or berries. Savory pierogis are often served with a topping of sour cream. Consider inviting congregants to participate in making pierogies as a way to be in solidarity with our siblings in Ukraine. Following are suggestions:



1. Invite a pierogi maker from your local Ukrainian community to teach you how to make pierogis. Alternatively, employ some creativity and give Grandma Adele's recipe a try! (See below). Download a video on [how to crimp the edges properly](#).
2. Play Ukrainian music from Spotify, which has many options of traditional music. Find playlists, compilations and individual albums there.
3. This is an opportunity to partner with a local Orthodox church, a primary Christian community in Ukraine. Many U.S. Orthodox churches are keeping Ukraine as a regular part of prayer and action regardless of whether they have recent immigrants in their midst. Learn from their practices, prayers and concerns.
4. Invite a local dance troupe to share traditional Ukrainian dance. Ask if they can also teach a dance to participants. Remember to support with a generous donation if possible.
5. Culminate the event in a meal of borscht, potato pancakes, Chicken Kiev and pierogies. Find recipes here: [Ukrainian pierogi recipe](#).



## More than empathy: Presbyterian partnerships in Ukraine

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) is at work in Ukraine through the ACT Alliance, an affiliation of organizations who are dedicated to emergency and ongoing work during disasters and in the rebuilding period. PDA does this in partnership with like-minded organizations to provide the most effective and efficient ministry to those who most need it. Coordination of resources (time, talent, financial support) is critical during a crisis. Faithful stewardship of our resources requires us to listen first so that we can identify personal agendas and biases that may or may not be helpful. In this way, those closest to the crisis lead and inform our support.



## PRESBYTERIAN DISASTER ASSISTANCE

**OUT OF CHAOS, HOPE**

Presbyterians are good at working with others. ACT makes sure that participating organizations share common values, are well-trained for the work and assures that outcomes are driven by those who best know the complex needs in the situation. Together with ACT, we consider practical needs like food, water and sanitation, as well as psycho-social support, education and other context-specific issues.

When disasters strike, people of faith are moved with empathy and concern. Strong mission needs more than empathy. Through the thoughtful and thorough work of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, communities receive practical support to back up the desire to express love and solidarity. They receive resources to survive, rebuild and thrive once again.

Ways to deepen understanding and provide support:

- Download [this informative PDF](#) from the ACT Alliance in Ukraine that shares their work.
- Learn more about the priorities of Presbyterian Disaster Relief from the [PDA Statement of Values](#).
- [Provide financial support through PDA](#).

Please contact [susan.krehbiel@pcusa.org](mailto:susan.krehbiel@pcusa.org) for more information.

*(In addition to working through ACT, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance also has direct relationships with reformed churches in the region such as the Hungarian Reformed Church.)*

