



Dear friends,

The Advent season is very important in the Orthodox world that I serve in. It is a solemn time with fasting, a time of preparation, reflection and centering on Christ's call in our lives. What does that mean in a time of war, loss and broken ties? Where is joy? Is it in a victory in Kherson with wild celebrations in the streets? Family bonds that have always crossed the borders of the former Soviet Union are deeply strained. I hear often, usually from people outside of the conflict, that it is too soon to talk about forgiveness, but is that Christ's message? Where is love? It is hard to see the end of this war. Where is hope? I know for certain that peace is something beyond the elusive end of this and other wars. Soldiers cannot bring peace. Weapons cannot bring peace. Victory cannot bring peace.

I look at the peacemakers who we walk with in Ukraine. Alla asks for prayers that their hearts might remain soft. Natalia explores ways to relieve the anger that consumes people. Yuriy works tirelessly to organize his community in care for the poor and vulnerable, in weekly prayer services and ongoing aid across Ukraine. They might have as much as two hours a day of electricity, heat and internet connection, but they carry on with hope and perseverance. They gather with their families at church for prayer with only candlelight, but they are warmed by the community. Our hope is always in Christ. May we stay focused on the light of Christ that the darkness cannot consume.

Ellen