

Sunday 25 February 2024



Suggested resources and service elements to aid reflection on the war in Ukraine

These elements have been prepared to aid those wishing to mark the anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. You can pick and choose from the elements below to add to your service and help your congregation to engage prayerfully and thoughtfully with the ongoing war.



Background

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This came eight years after the illegal annexation of Crimea and the beginning of conflict in the Donbas region.

According to the US-based [Council on Foreign Relations](#), military casualties has climbed to an estimated half a million. Fighting and air strikes have inflicted nearly 22,000 civilian casualties, while 5.1 million people are internally displaced. A further 6.2 million people have fled Ukraine. (Figures are drawn from the United Nations and US officials.)

A year ago, Bishop Christian Alsted, who has episcopal oversight of the United Methodist Church in Ukraine, wrote the following words, which still hold true:

“Things are getting worse, and the war is taking its toll on the strength of the pastors and leaders. Nevertheless, an amazing ministry of hospitality to fellow Ukrainians and care for the community is going on, and in the churches, people continue to gather for worship, prayer meetings and even children’s and youth ministry; where in person gatherings are not possible, people meet online.

There are three main prayer concerns lifted by our people in Ukraine:

Pray for the protection of the Ukrainian people who are facing a long and cold winter with frequent missile and drone attacks.

Pray for the protection of critical infrastructure such as power plants and water supplies.

Pray that God will stop the war and bring peace, justice and reconciliation to all of the Ukrainian people.”

To aid your theological reflection on the war, you may find this [podcast from Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf](#) helpful:

Materials for worship

Call to worship: *selected verses from Psalm 31, which has become a key Scripture for Ukrainian Christians since the invasion. The Bible Society has produced a [video of the Psalm read in Ukrainian](#).*

Leader: In you, Lord, I have taken refuge;

All: let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness.

Leader: Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue;

All: be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me.

Leader: Into your hands I commit my spirit;

All: deliver me, Lord, my faithful God.

Leader: Praise be to the Lord,

All: for he showed me the wonders of his love when I was in a city under siege. You heard my cry for mercy when I called to you for help.

Leader: Love the Lord, all his faithful people!

All: Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.

Lament

In lament, we face up to the difficult emotional reality of war; refusing to become desensitised to the injustice and joining with the victims of war in their grief and sadness. We remember all who are affected by war: those who have lost homes, livelihoods and loved ones; soldiers on both sides, put in harm's way by the decisions of Vladimir Putin and those who support him; Russian protestors and dissidents; refugees settling far from home; the global poor feeling the impact of inflation and food production.

A lament is not simply an expression of our grief and pain, but a cry for help based on confidence in God's character. Lament is a key biblical theme, common in the Psalms and the prophets. You may want to use some of the following passages as inspiration:

[2 Chronicles 20:12](#)

[Lamentations 3](#)

Several psalms (e.g. [Psalm 6](#), [Psalm 88](#), [Psalm 137](#))

[Jeremiah 9:17-24](#)

Actions:

- You could lead your congregation in a minute's silence for the victims of war.
- You could split your congregation into groups to discuss some of the following questions:

- Can you remember how you felt when you heard the news about the invasion? Have your feelings changed as the war has progressed – if so, how?
- What would you do if the UK was attacked and your town was under siege? Would you stay or leave your home (and where would you go if so)?
- How would you feel if you had a loved one on the frontlines?
- Would you feel equipped to seek refuge and settle in another country?
- How would you get through the winter without heating, electricity or gas?
- What items are on your person right now? If an air raid siren went off now and you had no time to collect anything, what would you be taking down to the shelter with you for the next few hours?
- You could have a craft activity to make an origami dove of peace. Check out this [guide](https://www.instructables.com/Origami-Peace-Dove/) for instructions: [instructables.com/Origami-Peace-Dove/](https://www.instructables.com/Origami-Peace-Dove/)

Prayer of petition

God of refuge, we pray for those endangered by war. We think of soldiers on the frontlines, civilians under missile fire and those forced to leave their homes. Shelter them under your wings and keep them safe.

God who binds all wounds, we pray for those in pain. Whether their suffering is physical, emotional or relational, we ask for your healing power.

God who comforts those who mourn, be with those who are bereaved. Help them through this difficult time.

God of redemption, we pray for President Putin and all who support his war. We know that no one is beyond your reach and pray that you will touch their hearts.

God of justice and peace, we cry out for an end to this war. We have no power to stop an army, but we put our trust in you. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.

Amen.

Protest

You could use the following notes as the basis of a sermon, using [Romans 8:18-28](#), [Micah 4:1-5](#), [Isaiah 11:1-9](#) or another passage of your choosing.

The anniversary gives us a chance to be reminded of the horror of war. We have become used to the headlines as they slip further out of our consciousness, but this week we are confronted again. We remind ourselves that every life lost is a precious child of God, bearing the divine image, slain in the name of a needless war of conquest.

We should allow ourselves to protest and rage against injustice, acknowledging the evil of the invasion of a sovereign country and the atrocities that have been committed against civilians. War is rarely an appropriate response to resolving conflict and we ask all governments to prioritise conflict prevention and mediation over ever-increasing investments in military force.

Sometimes we are reluctant to embrace anger in response to injustice. Perhaps we are wary of making too strong a statement, or feel that such emotion is un-Christian. Yet, time and

again, the prophets of the Old Testament show us that God responds to injustice with righteous anger as well as mercy. As we grow closer to God, we begin to be moved by the things that move God's heart.



However, the prophets didn't just complain about the state of things – they pointed towards a more glorious future where God reigns. In acknowledging just how broken the world around us is, our need for Christ's rule of peace and justice becomes ever clearer. Protest is an opportunity to profess the hope that we hold, that God will make all our brokenness beautiful in its time. As citizens of that kingdom, our hopeful existence is itself a form of protest against the forces of death and darkness.

Prayer of confession

Lord, we confess that we have not paid close enough attention to the tragic loss of life in Ukraine and other conflicts around the world. We have not been moved to lament and righteous anger at the senseless evil of war.

We are too easily distracted to face up to human sin and death. Each life lost is worthy of mourning, a precious child in your image lost to violence.

Forgive us for looking the other way and passing by on the other side of the road, as our brothers and sisters are killed and oppressed. Individually and corporately, we have not done enough to help those in need.

We acknowledge that violence comes in many forms, and war does not emerge out of nowhere. Give us understanding to see where fear of the other has taken root in our own country and our own lives.

Search our hearts, O God, and see if there is any offensive way in us. Teach us to follow the way of Christ, who laid down his power and took up the cross. Lead us in the path of peace.

Amen.

Christ forgives all who truly repent; no one is beyond his reach. Hear then, this good news: your sins are forgiven.

Act

“Blessed are the peacemakers,” Jesus taught, “for they will be called children of God” ([Matthew 5:9](#)). Actively working for peace is a Christian vocation. Action helps us move beyond despair and into hope. While we may not be involved on the frontlines or in diplomatic talks, there are a number of things we can do to act for peace right where we are. Suggestions for action can be found in the Get Involved section of the [Toolkit for churches responding to the crisis in Ukraine](#).

Prayer of sending out

Jesus, we praise you as the Prince of Peace. We pray for your kingdom to come, where swords are beaten into plowshares and we study war no more.

May we be vessels of your peace and instruments for your justice. Send us out to make peace in the power of your Spirit.

If you have any Ukrainians in your congregation, you could invite them to say the Lord's Prayer or read [Psalm 31](#) in Ukrainian.

Hymn suggestions

God's continuing presence

[Be still and know that I am God](#) (StF 18)

[Everlasting God, the years go by but you're unchanging](#) (StF 46) cf. [Immortal, invisible, God only wise](#) (StF 55)

[Lord, in our lonely hours](#) (StF 616)

God at work in "our fragile world"

[Hail to the Lord's Anointed](#) (StF 228)

[Heaven shall not wait](#) (StF 701)

[Praise to the God who clears the way](#) (StF 183)

Praying for peace

[God! As with silent hearts we bring to mind how hate and war diminish humankind](#) (StF 698)

['Look around you, can you see?'](#) (StF 525)

[We pray for peace, but not the easy peace](#) (StF 719)

[When the bonds of love are breaking](#) (StF 656)

What can we say and do?

[Community of Christ, who make the Cross your own](#) (StF 681)

[God grant us words to speak when words are all we bear](#) (StF 647)

[Longing for light, we wait in darkness](#) (StF 706)

[Make me a channel of our peace](#) (StF 707)

[Toolkit for churches responding to the crisis in Ukraine](#) includes further hymns, prayers and theological resources