

# Welcoming Ukrainian Refugees in Wittenberg

**W**hen Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Natalia Zubrytska packed one suitcase, bought bread and water, and fled with her children. She didn't know where they were going, but she knew her home was no longer safe.

The Zubrytskas ended up in Wittenberg, Germany, where they found shelter and a warm welcome at the International Lutheran Center at the Old Latin School (OLS) — a building originally remodeled by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) and its partners as a place for Lutherans to stay, study and learn about the Reformation. Since the building was already equipped with living facilities, the LCMS was able to repurpose it quickly to accommodate the newly arriving Ukrainian refugees.

“The people of the Synod responded to our plea for contributions quickly. We then looked for places that would work well to help, and the OLS worked perfectly,” said the Rev. James Krikava, who was the LCMS regional director for Eurasia at the time.

The Old Latin School currently hosts about 30 refugees — mostly women and children

— who are from the Lutheran church in Ukraine. But this wasn't always the case. Early on, the German government assigned some refugees to the OLS. Since then, many of the first refugees have found jobs and moved on to other locations.

The Synod's German partner church, the Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche, called Pastor Andriy Honcharuk to lead the ministry. Over time, a wonderful outreach has developed, and the Divine Service is now held in the Ukrainian language every Sunday morning.

In addition, ministry leaders organize community events like movie nights and classes for learning English or German. Yet, worship remains at the heart of the ministry and something

that the families look forward to each week.

“We were so happy to sing in our own language and to listen to the Word of God in our language,” Zubrytska said of the first Ukrainian worship service in Wittenberg. “And then some more Ukrainians were coming to us because they learned that we have the congregation here. ... Now, thank God, we have a big congregation.”



Ukrainian Lutheran refugees gather for worship on Sunday, April 23, 2023, at the International Lutheran Center at the Old Latin School in Wittenberg, Germany.

**“We were so happy to sing in our own language and to listen to the Word of God in our language.”**

— Natalia Zubrytska

# Give God Glory...

... for Orphan Grain Train (OGT) of Norfolk, Neb., an LCMS Recognized Service Organization (RSO) that rallied local churches, schools and groups to welcome approximately 60 Ukrainian refugees to the community. Individuals volunteered to clean and prepare places to live, provide transportation and translation services, supply home goods and other provisions, and offer assistance in finding employment. Now, those Ukrainian families are helping one another. Learn more about OGT at [ogt.org](http://ogt.org).



... for the Rev. Dr. David and Jennifer Preus, LCMS career missionaries serving in Eurasia,

based in Romania. In this role, David serves as a professor with the Luther Academy in Riga, Latvia, where he provides theological education to future pastors of the Eurasia region. He also serves as an assistant pastor, recruiter and mentor to new pastors in the lower Balkan and Mediterranean subregion. Learn more at [lcms.org/preus](http://lcms.org/preus).

... for Camp Linn Haven, a new LCMS RSO and Christian summer camp located in Linville, N.C. Its mission is to provide a safe, Christian vacation setting for people of all ages and abilities. The camp offers opportunities to combine the camping experience with worship and devotional activities, as well as to encourage fellowship through the many recreational activities available. Learn more at [camplinnhaven.org](http://camplinnhaven.org).

One of the priorities of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is to reach out in mercy and compassion to those in need, motivated by Christ and His Gospel, according to the Lutheran confession of the faith. This is accomplished under the familiar name of LCMS World Relief and Human Care, which the Synod uses to describe the mercy work directed by the policies of the Boards for National and International Mission and implemented through the programs of the Offices of National and International Mission.

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Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison      Ext. 1402  
President  
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Christian J. Boehlke      Ext. 1311  
Interim Executive Director  
LCMS Office of International Mission

Rev. Daniel M. Galchutt      Ext. 1730  
Executive Director  
LCMS Office of National Mission

## You Make the Difference through LCMS World Relief and Human Care

You make the ministry described in this newsletter possible! Your prayers and contributions to World Relief and Human Care “Where Needed Most” help deliver our Savior's mercy to people in need. You bolster tightly restricted donations from others to help fully fund important mercy projects, allowing us to report here the impact you are making in Christ's name. The courtesy envelope in this issue allows you to send a future contribution as the Holy Spirit leads, when He leads.





# PROVIDING A Caring Community IN Iowa

**M**ore than 8 million Ukrainians have fled to Poland, Germany and other European countries since early 2022. For Alex Gerzhyk and his wife and young daughter, their journey brought them all the way to the small town of Hubbard, Iowa — thanks to the diligent efforts of an LCMS congregation.

Gerzhyk is from Odesa, where he served until recently as an administrator for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine. In 2016, he met the Rev. Dr. Matthew Rueger, pastor of St. John Lutheran Church, Hubbard, when Rueger traveled to Ukraine to lead a theological workshop.

When the war started, Rueger reached out to Gerzhyk to ask if there was anything the family needed. At first, Gerzhyk declined assistance. But when Russian forces attacked Ukraine's electricity infrastructure in September 2022, Gerzhyk began to worry for the safety of his family.

Rueger discussed options with his congregation, and they decided to assist the Gerzhyks by participating in the U.S. government's Uniting for Ukraine program. This special opportunity allows Ukrainian citizens who have an American sponsor to come to the U.S. on a two-year humanitarian "parole" — which is permission from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to enter the U.S. "for a temporary period for urgent humanitarian reasons."

There were piles of paperwork, but the process progressed quickly. On Dec. 14, the Gerzhyks landed on American soil. Members of St. John welcomed the family, found housing and a car for them, and helped them get settled. Rueger says the congregation paid about \$9,000 up front and approximately \$1,000 per month for the first few months to cover rent and food.

Since Gerzhyk already spoke English, it did not take long for him to find a job once his Social Security paperwork went through. He and his wife were grateful to arrive in Hubbard and to already have a caring Lutheran community waiting for them.

Rueger says the process has been good for the congregation as well: "Just knowing that we're having an opportunity to actually help those in need like that ... and love them as Christians should [do] has gone a long way in the congregation for helping people see real, face-to-face application of the Gospel. It's not just well wishes but putting themselves on the line, and God has blessed this congregation with decent resources and very generous people."

The LCMS is offering a special grant program to aid LCMS congregations and Recognized Service Organizations that want to share Christ's love by sponsoring Ukrainian refugees like St. John, Hubbard, did. Visit [lcms.org/ukraine-grant](https://lcms.org/ukraine-grant) to learn more.



Alex Gerzhyk (blue and white shirt) and his wife and young daughter enjoy fellowship with members of St. John Lutheran Church, Hubbard, Iowa, on March 27, 2023.

Photos: LCMS Communications/Erik M. Lunsford

## Believe and Love

**"I must believe in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and then also love my neighbor. The Catechism teaches me this. Yet we minimize the importance of such doctrine today. How many of us pay heed to it?" says Martin Luther (LW 22:443).**

When we think about doctrine, we think about the doctrine of God, the doctrine of Christ's human and divine natures, the doctrine of Baptism, the doctrine of Holy Communion, and so on. We often don't think of love as a Christian doctrine, or mercy, or generosity or one's responsibility to a needy neighbor. But Luther says, "I must believe ... and then also love ... . The Catechism teaches me this."

The Small Catechism teaches the doctrine of the Fifth Commandment ("You shall not murder"). Luther explains its meaning biblically: "We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need." This love of neighbor has its origin, its motivation, in Christ and the strong doctrine of His two natures, human and divine. He is the God-man. Because His blood is divine blood, which "cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7), we are forgiven and given new hearts after His own. "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers" (1 John 3:16).

This is our sacred biblical and Lutheran doctrine. Christ loves us and demonstrated it. We are Christ's own, and thus ever more like Him. We love. It's challenging to sort this out sometimes. One has to make difficult decisions according to vocation, location and love connected to the clear teaching of the Gospel. Sometimes we might have to refuse a certain type of charity because of the potential for harm (giving money to an addict, for instance). Sometimes we are called to help without knowing the outcome, leaving it to God. Sometimes God drops the mandate and opportunity to love right in our laps, as He did with the Old Latin School and our dear Ukrainian friends. Thanks be to God.

In Christ,

Pastor Matthew C. Harrison  
President, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

