

Visiting Widows in their Distress

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world. James 1:27

From Jeff: I was recently in Ukraine, and Natalia, an MP family sponsorship coordinator, and I visited three families of widows and their children. Natalia wanted me to meet the families personally, pray with them, and assess how we could help. I thought of Psalm 68:5, which says that “God is a defender of widows,” and James 1:27, which calls us to “visit widows in their distress.” It is such a privilege to serve the Lord in this way.

Sponsorship and the Hope of Jesus

We drove about 3 hours south of the capital Kyiv through heavy forests and bright fields of sunflowers. Warm and sunny, it did not feel like Ukraine was at war. Still, our day of visiting widows in small villages was interrupted by multiple air raid sirens telling the public to “take cover.” We didn’t hear any explosions, but the sirens reminded me that these wives could not escape the war that had taken their husbands.

Each woman had children, lived in a small house in a rural area near the city, and was determined to raise her children to honor their father. They wanted to talk about their husbands, their life today, and their families.

Borscht, Bread and Memories

Visiting widows and their kids was both sad and encouraging. My heart went out to them, and yet their strength was amazing. The first family we visited was Liubov and her two daughters, ages 12 and 13.

They have their own small home which their father built. We took off our shoes and entered the living room, where a table held photos and mementos of their dad, Vasyli. The girls were proud of their dad, and excited that an American was coming to visit. “Are you hungry?” They asked. “We have borscht!”



A memorial to Vasyli stands in their village.



Liubov with daughters Oleksandra and Anastasia.



The living room was filled with photos, flags, and mementos of their dad.

Liubov works as an accountant, and their life was deeply affected by the loss of her husband. He gave his life 16 months earlier in the Donbas region defending Ukraine. She took some time off work to prepare lunch for our visit. I explained that we would like to find sponsors for them and invite their kids to one of our summer camps. Their eyes lit up. Mom smiled. She knew the girls were excited to go to camp.

When I explained that we would give their family photo to their sponsor and asked if that was okay, Liubov reached for the family photo album, thinking there might be a good photo there. What happened next was a journey through

memories: pictures of happier times, picnics, the first day of school, their wedding day.

Then came pages of photos of her husband in his trench, on the front lines, defending his country, hanging with his brothers-in-arms, dirty and tired. She wanted me to know him, to know that he died honorably, that he died for them. It was time for us to leave, but Liubov didn't want us to go.

"Can I get you some more tea?" she asked. "Here, I have some other pictures. This is us by the lake when the girls were little. I made dessert. Would you like some?"

I thought about the hope of Christ: it is not only spiritual, but also physical. It is sitting on the couch sharing memories of happier days. It is sharing your burdens and your time with someone else. In that way, the distress or trouble of James 1:27 seems to reduce, to subside, when you know there will be a sponsor, a connection to someone who cares. If you sponsor a family, you help make that hope tangible.



Liubov and the girls didn't want us to leave.

Sponsorship Is More Than Money

If you sponsor a family, please know that your sponsorship is so much more than money. We don't understand the impact of not being forgotten. These moms, living in a village on a dirt road in Ukraine, learn that someone in America is praying for them and cares about them. It felt like a little miracle of hope was planted that day.

Challenges Raising Boys

The next family we visited was a young mother, Alina, with her two boys, Illia and Yehor. She worked around the corner at the Nova Posta (post office) and could leave for a few minutes. She showed us her new house being built down the street with support from the government. Alina, now a single mom raising two pre-teen boys, appreciates the help that sponsorship provides.



Alina with her two boys. She works at the post office.

Olena Wants To Be Self-Sufficient

Olena is doing everything she can to ensure that Ivan grows up surrounded by love and care. She wants him to understand that he must develop his abilities. She doesn't want to receive assistance; she wants to become more self-sufficient through hard work.

Despite the difficult loss they have experienced, Olena and Ivan continue moving forward. She is proud of her husband's sacrifice and is committed to work and build a future for themselves.



Olena and her 10-year-old son Ivan outside their village home.

New Sponsors Needed For Families

Many new families are joining our Family Sponsorship program. Some are widows, some are displaced by war, others are very poor. But the hope and forgiveness of knowing Christ is for everyone. A sponsorship provides help with finances, education, health, and attending our camps. Your support empowers us to share our faith, make disciples, and visit widows in their distress.