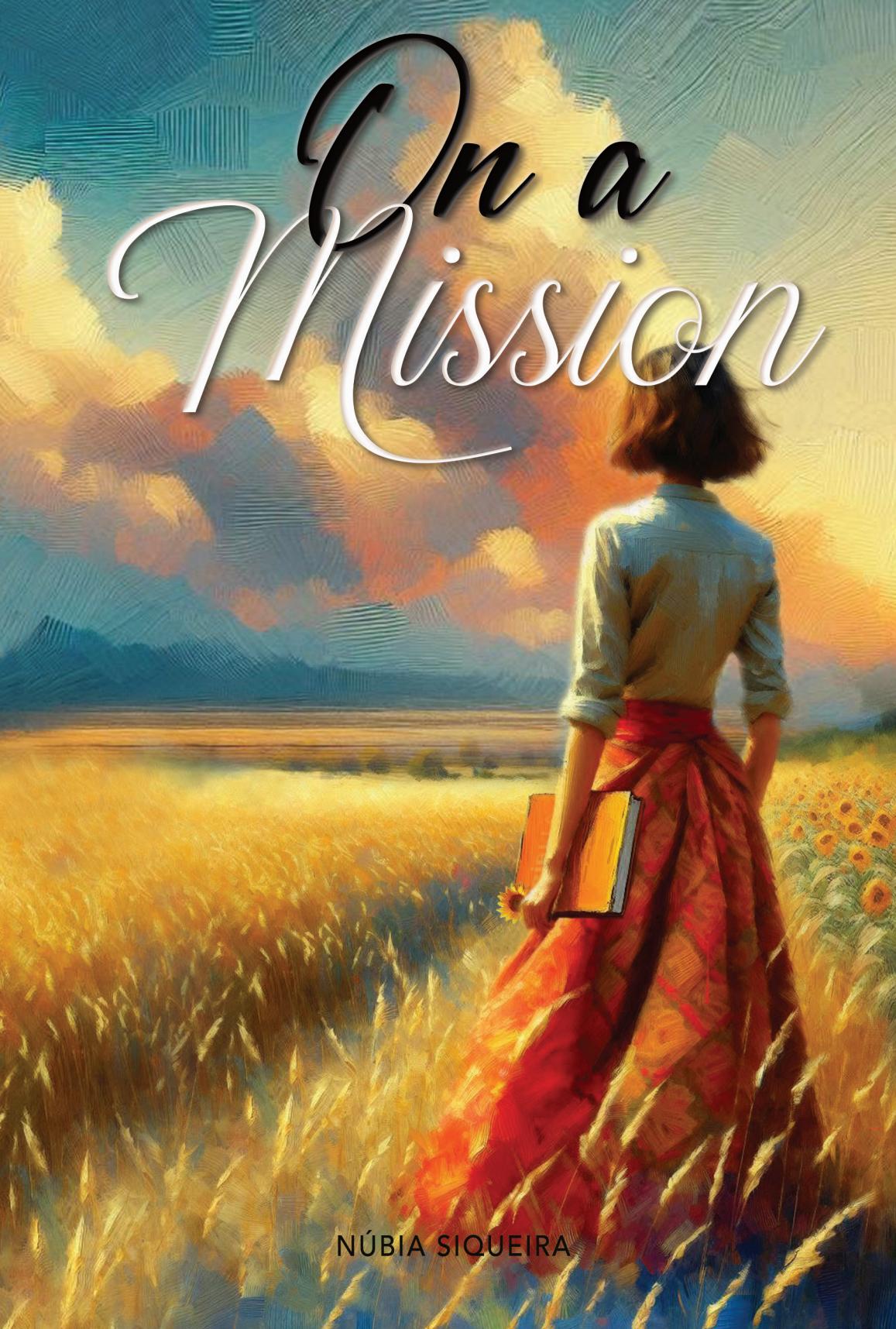


On a Mission



NÚBIA SIQUEIRA

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to all women who dare
to go out into the world on a mission, which in most cases
will cost them all their personal dreams. Although these women
realize the sacrifice that the calling demands
and the difficult reality that they will have to face every day,
they see life through the eyes of the living faith.

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Introduction

Iknow that the world has had remarkable women, who played important roles in the development of the Church of the Lord Jesus. It is no different in our days. The Work of God continues to count on women who are more valuable than the finest of rubies. They are of various ages, were born in different places and serve God in distant regions. But the faith, courage, and love that they have demonstrated, wherever they go, save lives and leave a legacy.

As women, we love to share our experiences with one another. This practice is even more encouraged when we know God and discover that living the Gospel means constantly giving of ourselves to those close to us. This book, therefore, was born from the desire to share with you the daily challenges faced by pastors' wives who are serving God amid the war in Ukraine.

Doing the Work of God under normal circumstances, that is, in a relatively safe country, with laws that protect biblical preaching or where the work is basically established, is not an easy task. Now, imagine serving in a country where alarms go off several times a day, forcing people to hide for hours in bunkers and where missiles fly through the sky, able to hit your home or church at any moment! This is exactly what these women face. Yet, despite all this, they choose to remain there.

Remaining in these circumstances at one's own free will, at risk of death, in a place where there is no light or heating, even during the harsh Eastern European winter, may be unimaginable for many people. But for these women, who often face a shortage of consumer goods considered common anywhere else and even the lack of an adequate hospital network, these challenges are a great proof of love for souls.

It was for this reason, after following and talking to my fellow companions of the Work of God about their daily lives, during these almost three years of intense conflict, that I decided to share the teachings I have obtained. These pearls of wisdom need not only to be registered, but also to be shared with others. After all, to love is to serve. And there is nothing greater to offer those we love than the precious Word of God. Remember that evangelizing is a privilege given to us only in this world. In Heaven, we will not have this possibility.

Taking this into consideration, don't expect me to talk here about theology, unprecedented concepts of missiology, or hypotheses about what can happen to someone who goes out into the world to preach. But, yes, do expect to understand the real challenges a woman faces when she marries a man who, before being committed to her, is married to God and to his calling. If it is not easy to be a companion and helper to a man with a common role, as we were created by God to be, it is even more challenging to help a man who has a calling of faith and deals with people's eternal future.

By following these stories, you will discover what goes on behind the scenes of the sirens, where the desire to continue helping others must be greater than one's fear of perishing. These pastors' wives share the experiences they've had during this lengthy and perilous conflict, from the moment the first missile exploded to the different activities of their daily life. They understand better than anyone that, in the Work of God, when you find yourself suddenly stuck in a warzone, everything that you have ever professed or read about faith, or about spiritual service, needs to switch from theory to reality in a matter of seconds.

However, how is this possible? How can one develop the strength to overcome the fragility, vulnerability, anguish and uncertainty of the upcoming night? What effect does the devastation have on human souls and families? Furthermore, how can these wives still be able to help other people who are facing tough moments, when so many emotions are consuming their own souls and gnawing at their convictions? And when their life is in jeopardy, what happens to the "here I am"? What kind of love is this that is capable of sacrificing one's own life, if necessary, at a time of so much selfishness?

These, along with other topics, are explained here for people who desire to serve God and pray that He will always include them in His plans.

After all, serving God is a journey that one cannot undertake on their own, in a superficial manner, and much less based on one's own strength. On the contrary, we need the Holy Spirit, and in His company, we can face any mission. With Him, we see beyond the horizon that our physical eyes allow us to see, and we yearn for eternity, because with it before us, everything makes sense.

We understand, therefore, through a personal revelation, that our life is precious to God and must fulfill the purpose for which we were designated. And that our sincere works, the fruits of our faith, are very well received by Him.

Therefore, no task and no place to which we are sent is an accident or a mere coincidence. For that reason, we need to be aware that being useful to God in the mission He has given us is to live without any glimmer of relevance in this world. Because those who truly serve, dream in fact of the smile of the Lord Jesus, who will one day say:

Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...

Matthew 25:34

Who will this book help?

Ibelieve this book will help many people who are undecided and need to have a clearer definition regarding their calling, so that they don't waste their time, mistaken about their purpose in life.

Many deceive themselves about their vocation, because they romanticize the Work of God. Therefore, I hope that any misunderstanding will end when reading about these women's experiences in Ukraine. What they went through, and still go through, helps each of us to evaluate our willingness to serve on the Altar and consider the daily offering we make to God.

I mention evaluation, because the Bible always commands introspection and self-examination. Just as the doctor orders several tests during a consultation, to verify our health, it is up to each servant to investigate their own heart as well as their desires, motivations, and spiritual condition.

Perhaps you say that you really want to serve as a pastor, missionary, or pastor's wife, but you are not aware of the great sacrifice you will have to make. Or, who knows, maybe you've understood the sacrifice it takes, but have never looked sincerely and deeply enough within yourself to realize that you're not really willing to sacrifice with such intensity.

This subject is also extremely important for those of you who are dating a pastor. Self-examination is crucial, so you do not make a commitment just out of enthusiasm and later regret it, thereby wasting the life of someone who could have a promising future preaching the Gospel. Can you imagine being a woman who prevents someone from being what God chose them to be?

If, deep down, you dream of having a career and being professionally successful, realize that serving on the Altar will never bring you this satisfaction. Because a servant of God should not have the desire for attention or to have his ego massaged by achievements and fame. He should simply live to serve, even if this means spending his entire life in anonymity, without people recognizing any of his achievements. The true servant is not concerned about his income, the brand of the vehicle he will drive (or if he will have one at all), his social life, or whether he will have free time for hobbies, travel, and friendships.

The lessons contained in this book will also be beneficial to single males. If they pay attention, their eyes will be enlightened to the importance of selecting a future wife. If people generally need to exercise caution when selecting their spouse, imagine someone who wishes to serve God as a missionary or pastor! What a man of God will encounter in his ministry over the years cannot be endured by just any woman. Or rather, not every woman has the love and willingness to sacrifice her entire life for the sake of such a spiritual ideal, as difficulties arise. And, given the influence of women over men, every young man needs to be aware that his wife will either be the voice of God to support him, or the voice of the devil in his head to discourage him in difficult times.

And for those of you who are reading this book and are simply members of the Church, this content can help you understand the challenges of the Work of God, as well as help you realize that the pastor's wife is a soul just like you. The difference is, she carries the responsibility that weighs upon her shoulders, of responding to God's calling to serve unknown people, from different cultures and, often, in remote places on the planet. She is challenged to overcome delicate and difficult situations, to a much greater extent than most people, such as learning complicated languages, enduring excessive cold or heat in regions she is not used to, and having her public life evaluated by the entire community in which she is inserted. The pastor's wife also lives constantly with instability; she may have her life organized at one moment but need to pack her bags in a hurry overnight and leave for a destination completely foreign to her.

By reading the issues discussed here, those who simply attend services, or serve God in the atrium, will gain a better understanding of the pastor's

and his wife's selflessness and passion for the work. Since they recognise that the church is extremely valuable to the One who selected them for this mission, they show great esteem for people and are capable of doing for others what they do for God. That's why, in order to fulfill their vocation, they leave behind parents, siblings, uncles, nephews and all their relatives, not knowing when they will see them again. And they begin to rejoice in the affection of those who become part of the family of faith, in their daily lives.

On the other hand, if they easily form attachments, they cannot allow themselves to get attached to anything or anyone, because the time will certainly come when they will be unexpectedly transferred to a new place. And the only thing they will take with them will be the good memories of everyone they met and helped there, where they were until then. The life of a pastor and his wife is a life rooted only in God. Therefore, avoid judgments and malicious comments regarding the way the pastor and his wife are serving.

Now, speaking specifically about pastors' wives, in essence, no woman of God is better than another. If she has the calling and carries it out with fear, it doesn't matter whether she holds meetings or not, whether she is communicative or more reserved, whether she is active on social media or not, it is her communion with God that will make all the difference in her ministry. As for the way she serves, each one serves according to the needs of her local church and according to the gifts and condition she received from the Lord.

Most pastors' wives are very hard-working, which is why they multitask. In other words, in addition to being housewives, they counsel people; teach at the Children's Biblical Centre (CBC); they take care of groups of teenagers and young people; they work on socio-educational projects for juvenile offenders; they cater to women in prison; they are dedicated to caring for the elderly; they answer calls in the call centres of the church, which are open all day, offering spiritual assistance; they assist with some type of literacy training, if a member needs it; they make home and hospital visits to the sick; in addition to the many other tasks that I could not mention all.

Therefore, rest assured that your pastor's wife works, because in all the places I've been and in all the phases of my life, there has never been a period when I was just a "couch potato", having nothing to do. Those who do the Work are not idle, because, in the church, there is always something to do for all those who truly want to serve.

But, if you don't belong to any of the groups mentioned above and picked this copy up out of curiosity, know that your interest in the subject is God working in some way to sow the good seed of service in your heart. Because, in God's eyes, to live is to serve!

Thus, I can say that this book is useful for everyone to reflect on! Choose a moment to read what was lovingly, and through many hands, written here. Sit in your favorite place, grab your cup of tea or coffee, and welcome to the holiness and seriousness that the ministerial calling demands of a pastor's wife!

The explosion

Testimony of Ana Cláudia, wife of Bishop Tiago Casagrande.

It was a normal night. We arrived home from church and went to sleep, without any worries about what could happen during the night. That's when we woke up to an explosion. However, it wasn't just any explosion. It's hard to explain... but imagine feeling the impact of a missile hitting the ground! The building was shaking and so was my body. It wasn't just a simple scare. Tiago quickly called some pastors who were working with us in different parts of Ukraine.

Initially, the plan was for us to meet up and stay together at the church, to see how that event would unfold. I knew that, even though I was very scared, I needed to remain calm. So, I packed some things to take with me and instructed the pastors' wives to do the same.

When we got to the church, Tiago did a live broadcast to talk to the members. We prayed together for God to protect everyone. Afterwards, we remained in the church. Then we were advised to leave Kiev temporarily to see what was happening.

Without any delay, we travelled by car towards the border to Poland; it was the most difficult trip of our lives. At that moment, the city was practically deserted. Everyone was leaving the capital and heading towards the border. And since everything had to be done in a hurry, we didn't stop much. When we needed to go to the bathroom or buy something to eat, we faced huge queues, which made things very difficult for us and made our situation even worse.

In that enormous chaos, we had to be resourceful and improvise everything, even regarding our physical needs, such was the uncertainty of what was going to happen in the next few hours. Kiev was seen as the eye of the hurricane. That's why, at that time, people were so desperate to get out of there as quickly as possible.

As the hours passed, we began to lose track of time, because the scenery was always the same: roads, traffic, chaos and darkness. It was February, so the early mornings were freezing. Add to that the extreme fatigue. We

were hungry, we needed to take a shower and sleep, at least a little. Faced with so many restrictions, I looked around and thought, “We’re going to learn to value everything we have much more.” Thus, since the war broke out, all the difficulties we’ve experienced have only been lessons for us!

Throughout the journey, I struggled to remain in the spirit of prayer. I would remember the people, each person we knew with their families, their stories, and I asked God to protect them all. The most painful thing was seeing the despair on people’s faces, especially the women’s. Many of them had left their husbands and sons behind, because adult men were not allowed to leave the country. Others struggled to carry their small children and luggage, facing all that alone.

I remember a lady who fell ill in the middle of the crowd heading out of Kiev. No one near her stopped to help her until she couldn’t stand it anymore and fell. When we managed to get close to her, she was already dead. These are scenes I will never ever forget.

At that point, it was decided that it would be safer to cross the border and stay in Poland, together with other Ukrainians who were crowding the streets of cities all over the country, especially in Warsaw. However, the closer we got to the border, the more difficult it became.

In addition to the huge queues of cars, there were also many people trying to cross the border on foot. Among them were many foreign students. The crossing alternated: sometimes the cars would pass, other times the pedestrians.

Once the gate opened for cars to cross over, the people on foot would desperately ask to get into the vehicles. That’s when two young foreigners approached us, and without speaking the local language, they made gestures with their hands, begging to get into our car. Tiago agreed and they got in. The look of relief and gratitude I saw on their faces is something I will remember forever.

When we were finally on Polish soil, I stopped for a moment and looked at the people who were there. The scene was bleak. There were thousands and thousands of people who were tired, sad, scared, but at the same time, with a look of relief that they had at least managed to escape the war. That was what crossing the border represented.

I wasn't prepared

Testimony of Edjane, wife of Pastor Diógenes Santos

Before any war breaks, there are rumors of war. We had already heard that there would be some kind of attack on Ukraine. But the truth is, no one believes that a war can actually happen, until the day it does.

I wasn't prepared. Even though we had a plan in case of an emergency, the reality was very different from what we tried to predict, and I had no idea what was about to come.

It was dawn. We woke up scared. The phone rang. On the other end, it was Bishop Tiago saying, "The war has started!"

I looked out the window and saw the movement of people hurrying down the building with their suitcases. My husband went to fill up the car, while I stayed to pack for the trip, but I didn't know what to take. I didn't know how many days we were going to be away. Everything had to be quick, and I couldn't think. I packed the basics into two suitcases, grabbed an autumn coat (even though it was winter) and off we went: my husband, our little dog and I.

Our goal was to reach the border of Poland, a distance of about a thousand kilometers. The roads were crowded, as people were leaving the city, all heading in the same direction. That's when we began to get a sense of what we were about to face.

We had to leave the main road and look for alternative routes, all in an attempt to avoid extensive queues. As we continued our journey, many thoughts went through my head about what would happen from then on. Questions such as, "What if a bomb falls here?", "What if we get lost on these dark roads?" Those were long and difficult days.

It was only after almost four days that we finally approached the border. The gates were closed to cars, so we had to leave the car and continue on foot. I was tired, cold and hadn't slept for so long! My head was spinning. It was like a nightmare, as if we were in a horror movie.

We walked for many hours, and since I didn't have a leash for Theo, our little dog, I had to carry him in my arms. We got close to the border gate, but there was a lot of commotion. As a result, the pedestrian crossing

was closed. Out of fear, people started climbing over the high partition, crossing over to Poland. We were so distressed by what was going on, because we could hear people screaming in pain as they fell on the other side, injured.

At that moment, I was almost trampled on. I tried to protect Theo, who was in my arms, and Diógenes tried to protect me. But I still got hurt and ended up with a lot of bruises on my legs, which took weeks to disappear. So, we left that area before any other tragedy occurred.

We begged dozens of bus drivers to let us on, in the hopes of standing in the aisle as the bus crossed the border. However, they all refused. It was only after a long time, and many attempts, that we managed to get on a bus and lay down in the aisle. Despite the harassment from the passengers, who found us a nuisance, we believed we were safe. However, all our efforts proved to be in vain, because soon afterwards, busses were also prohibited to cross over.

It was Sunday morning; all I could think about was that we were supposed to be in church. Yet, there we were, being mistreated on the floor of a bus, physically and emotionally exhausted. It was the most painful moment for me! I wanted to be at church, I wanted to get out of there, but I didn't know how...

Then, in tears, I cried out to God for help. The weeping was in my soul, as I couldn't speak in such conditions. Nevertheless, He heard me and helped me. At that very moment, peace and strength that were not mine came over me. I composed myself, it was as if I had rested for many days, because my soul was renewed. That prayer was not said out loud, nor in a specific position, but it worked in such a way that I stood up completely different.

After that, the idea came to me to cross the entire control booth area until I reached the other side again. At that moment, we saw a small queue forming on the other side. We had already tried everything, but the Holy Spirit insisted that we go back to that first point. We went and joined that line. And finally, we managed to cross over to Poland.

In the sights of a rifle

Testimony of Jeniffer, wife of Pastor Francisco Baiadori

Even with war breaking out in several Ukrainian cities, I didn't want to leave. I thought about the church, the people, Israel's school... I had conflicting thoughts in my head and sorrow trapped in my chest.

There was a lot of movement in the city where we were and long queues at pharmacies, supermarkets, gas stations and ATMs. People were desperate. The airport was bombed, and the train stations were closed, so we could only leave by car.

I was apprehensive about my son. After all, how could I protect a 7-year-old child amid all that turmoil? Deep down, I was afflicted, but I tried to act naturally so I wouldn't cause Israel any distress. I asked God to guide us, and we left Dnipro towards Lviv, the closest city to the Polish border.

Besides the tense atmosphere, we had to deal with the many soldiers, sniffer dogs, barricades and war tanks. It looked like a movie scene, but it was real.

During the long journey, the army stopped us dozens of times at roadblocks. The initial inspections were tenser. Soldiers with dogs searched our car. A rifle was always pointed at us from a distance, while other soldiers surrounded and interrogated us.

My heart would race as I thought about my son. I didn't want Israel to be scared and therefore traumatized in the future. During one of the tensest moments we faced, I looked behind the car, fearing what Israel was thinking, but to my surprise, he was asleep. That was the case almost every single time.

Francisco, my husband, was very tired. We hadn't slept in days, but what really hurt me was seeing my son not eating properly, cold, in pain and his lips already sore from the intense cold. It broke my heart. There were times I felt like crying.

The sensation we had was that at any moment a war tank could appear, or a missile could fall near us and end it all. All I could think of was, “Lord, I place our lives in Your hands.” And God guarded us all the time, even when we didn’t understand that.

There was a time when the car broke down and we had to look for a mechanic to help us. That was yet another delay on a journey that seemed endless. But afterwards, we heard about an explosion that occurred further ahead, at the exact time we would have been passing through that area. So, had the car not broken down, we would’ve been hit.

During the course of our lives, we’ve all experienced being spared from danger. But that particular day I had the most concrete proof that God takes perfect care of His children! The feeling of relief and safety that I had because of His sovereignty, which is real, was extraordinary and difficult to explain.

Amid all this, we also had to reassure our family members in Brazil, who were panicking about the news. My mother would send us audio messages in tears, constantly asking us to return to our country. That’s why I started recording videos during the trip and serenely tried to calm them down.

The nights were the worst. But when the new day dawned and the first sunrays would shed light upon that darkness, God would speak to me and strengthen me. That’s why I can affirm that even amid the war, when fear would try to set in, the Holy Spirit would come and fill us with peace.

God's care

Testimony of Anastasiia, wife of Pastor Darlan Oliveira

Iam Ukrainian. Since my childhood, I've always heard about wars. My paternal great-grandparents fought in the Second World War, and their fates intertwined in a hospital after being wounded in action. They fell in love so deeply that they got married right there and then.

At school, we also heard about the consequences of war. I remember hearing about a period when salt was more expensive than gold, such was the extent of the hunger during the war. People had to eat potatoes with their skins on so they wouldn't waste anything. Therefore, I grew up afraid of war. Unlike people in other parts of the world, who enjoy watching war movies, I couldn't watch films of this genre because I would have nightmares afterwards.

Thus, when the attacks on February 24, 2022 began, it was as if all the stories I had heard my entire life were coming true. As I was leaving Kyiv, I was conflicted. Part of me understood that the mission would continue in another place because many people were being displaced and needed help. But another part of me thought that I was betraying those we were leaving behind. So, I prayed and cried for them.

I recall that when we called the people who had not left the capital during the attack, I heard how God was protecting them and their families. I couldn't hold back the tears, I just thanked God with all my strength. I learned that He was the one protecting them. I couldn't be with them in Kyiv, but God could and that was enough. God is always more than enough!

I heard that missiles were hitting several places. One hit the school where my nephew studied and destroyed everything. Another fell near the window of a church member's house, which is less than 100 meters away from my home, and surprisingly, it didn't explode.

My grandmother told me that the village where she lived had been taken, but my family managed to get out safely. In other villages, however, hundreds of people were unable to escape. So, I saw God's hand in everything, on my family and on the members of the church.

Like the Primitive Church

Testimony of Olga, wife of Pastor Serguei Dzhugastranskyi

While the foreign pastors were heading to Poland, my husband and I, who are Ukrainians, left Kyiv for Lviv. The goal was to find a place where we could stay until everything calmed down. But this was not an easy task; after all, a large part of the Ukrainian population fled to Lviv.

Given the circumstances, the best accommodation we could find was an old, very cold and isolated wooden house. On the first day, we built a fire outside so we could cook and keep warm. This house, which we named the “Primitive Church,” sheltered twenty people who were with us: my mother, some employees and some members of the church.

We shared everything, including the shower. We prayed together, ate together and helped each other. From then on, we embarked on a story filled with many lessons.

We saw on the news that many cities had been occupied. There was destruction everywhere. But when we called people, we heard many testimonies of how God was protecting His people. A woman told us, “Pastor, debris from a missile fell into my room while I was reading the Bible. But we are all safe, thank God!”

Another family, which did not manage to escape from the capital in time, had to go out when they ran out of food. When they left their house, they saw that all the cars on their street had been destroyed, except theirs. They then managed to drive with their car intact, amidst a scene of chaos.

In addition to caring for those who were with us, we were worried about the people who were in places that were under heavy bombing. But when our souls would get troubled, pain would tighten our chests, the calls would come, and we would hear about God’s deliverance in their lives. This calmed us and was like ointment for our hearts. We literally did not know what would happen the next day, or even the next minute. But despite the fear, we had peace.

There was a moment, however, when I experienced the feeling of panic for the first time. It was when Serguei was on the road, transporting

a couple of foreign pastors to the border to Poland, and the siren rang loudly. For a moment, I imagined a bomb destroying our car and I panicked inside of me. When I got home, I went to cry in a private place. I didn't want my husband or the other people with us to worry, so I poured my heart out to God. I surrendered that feeling to Him and He comforted me with His unique embrace.

During that first week, I lived and practiced my faith, and everything worked out so God could use us more today. It's in these moments, when we stare death in the eye, that we evaluate ourselves and find out whether or not we are truly ready to fulfill what we promised, when we put ourselves at the disposal of the Holy Spirit. This is the time when the power of the Holy Spirit in us is even more noticeable, because, on our own, we would not be able to remain well inside.

I can say that, even when everything on the outside is chaotic, it's possible to have perfect peace on the inside.

A new reality

Testimony of Jeniffer, wife of Pastor Francisco Baiadori.

It was the fourth day of war, the situation on the border was progressively getting worse. So, we stayed in Lviv for a few days, in the same house as Olga and Pastor Serguei, both Ukrainians. This was the house that was affectionately called the "Primitive Church", because we shared everything. It was small and always crowded. There were no mattresses, so everyone slept on the floor. Before that, everyone had their own homes, which were safe and comfortable, but now we were all living in a new reality, and we had to adapt.

While it was just the three of us, my husband, my son and I, I was able to handle the difficulties we were experiencing and protect my son from the scary news.

However, I couldn't do so while in this house, where everyone was talking about the initial stages of war. People were still scared, which was understandable.

Up until that moment, Israel was not aware that Ukraine had been invaded and that we were on that long journey attempting to flee from attacks. In his opinion, we were just being transferred to another place, like the other times.

What transpired during those days was like the plot from the movie *Life Is Beautiful*, in which Guido, a Jewish man who lived in Italy, is captured with his son and both are sent to a concentration camp in Germany. For the sake of the child, Guido makes the horrors of the Second World War seem like a game, so that little Giosu  is not aware of what is happening.

We adopted the same strategy, which worked well while it was just the three of us. However, when we arrived at the “Primitive Church”, which was in a forest, Israel overheard the conversations people were having and that’s when all his questions started. I would just tell him not to worry, because God was taking care of all of us.

I did this because I wanted to protect my son. Indeed, I tried, but I wasn’t in control. That’s why I felt so powerless before those circumstances. My faith was being tested and I, more than anyone, needed to learn in practice how to truly trust in God.

We spent a week in that wooden house, where we had no proper dishes, food was limited, and showers were almost always cold. We shared tasks, made calls to church members, met to pray and meditate on the Word of God, and despite everything that was going on, we still managed to sing and laugh together.

It was a difficult time, in which we needed to be strong to help one another. But at night, when I went to bed, I would cry quietly and ask God for strength. This was a necessary process, because how would we have been able understand and help people if we didn’t experience the difficulties firsthand?

So, the day came for us to continue our journey to Poland, and it was very difficult to say goodbye. We cried when we left those people, because we wanted to stay together. That cycle, which was difficult at first and to which we adapted as the days went by, was closing. We had to accept this process.

Life becomes much easier when we understand that, in order to experience God’s newness, we need to leave behind the lifestyle we are used to. It’s in this discomfort that we grow and show that we truly trust in God.

A door opens

Testimony of Olga, wife of Pastor Serguei Dzhugastranskyi

Afew weeks later, we left our beloved wooden house and moved to another place, closer to the city. We saw a huge number of people on the streets there. It was as if the whole of Ukraine had moved to Lviv. So, an opportunity arose for us to evangelize.

We quickly began looking for a hall to open a church. We found a place and dedicated ourselves to renovating it. While repairing the hall, we made a makeshift bed out of some wood and a used mattress we found in the place, and we decided to live there.

During this period, the spiritual and humanitarian aid work on the other side of the border also continued unabated. And this aid, which the Ukrainian refugees in Poland received, was extended to us in Lviv. We received several large trucks with tons of food to distribute to the people who were left with nothing. The Universal Church in Europe, led by Portugal, sent food, warm clothes, blankets, medicines, toys and water to Warsaw.

The large trucks could not enter Ukraine. But the supplies were transported from the Polish border in smaller vehicles and were distributed to thousands of Ukrainian families, who were hungry and desperate.

Life at that time was intense as we helped strangers in Lviv, members of the church spread throughout the country and their loved ones. Thus, we became a much closer family. The church in Lviv was born amid the horrors of war. Even before we opened the doors of our building, we were already receiving dozens of people every day.

These were people who had lost everything, filled with resentment and hatred in their hearts, without any direction or any hope. I saw despair in their eyes, as well as pain and a lack of peace. However, when they started participating in the meetings, listening to the Word of God and speaking to Him, we noticed a change in them. They would leave with a different countenance. This could only be attributed to the action of the Holy Spirit, because we ourselves did not know what to say to them.

When my husband had to leave Kyiv, he felt very bad. I could see the struggle he was facing inside of him, because we didn't understand God's purpose at that moment. But afterwards, everything became very clear to us. That's why I learned that we must obey, even without understanding. Faith allows us to stand on the safe ground of our Lord's Promises. Even if we see nothing or feel nothing, if we submit; His faithfulness will honor us.

Going to Lviv opened a great and timely door. Many souls are being reached through this obedience.

I choose to stay

Testimony of Joseane, wife of Pastor Jefferson Santos

Like the other foreign pastors, we went to Poland. I was able to take my first shower after three days of that agonizing trip. I cried, thanking God for taking care of each one of us.

I can still remember the soft bed in the hotel room, the warm blanket and the first meal I had after so many days of eating only chips and cookies. There was no place to buy food on the road because the gas stations had run out of food quickly, due to the huge flow of people on the roads. All we had was a little bit of water and snacks in our bags. But God sustained us with the little we had.

I learned to appreciate the little things and see God's hand in everything. When we started doing the Work of God, I left everything behind: my family, my personal dreams, my country, my friends...

But now, God was asking me for another level of surrender. Leaving quickly, with only the clothes I needed, made me realize whether or not I was attached to anything. And can I tell you something? I missed none of the things I left behind! We need this kind of reality check to realize, finally, what is truly important to us.

The first chance we got, we attended a church meeting in Warsaw.

Alessandra, the local pastor's wife, welcomed us with such affection! She prepared delicious food for us; I didn't even know how to thank her! During that meeting, I just cried. My nerves were on edge; I couldn't

stop thinking about the people who stayed in Ukraine, who were being subjected to those bombings.

After the meeting, I received a call from the Brazilian embassy, insisting that I return to Brazil. I declined. When I refused to repatriate, the official on the other end of the line was shocked. He told me to reply by email, making it clear that I was assuming all responsibility for what would happen to me from then on since they had tried to help me return to Brazil and I refused.

This official from the embassy then contacted a close member of my family, my brother, who quickly called me, saying, “The embassy told me that you chose not to return. Our father is dying of cancer, and you don’t want to come back? That just shows how much you care about us!”

As much as those words hurt me, I understood that he was very worried about me and only wanted the best for me. I listened to everything in silence, and before ending the call, I simply said that everything was going to be fine.

When I hung up the phone, I cried a lot about everything that was happening: the war, my sick father, my worried family... and to top it all off, I was still dealing with a health issue that was only getting worse.

During the entire trip to Poland, I was in a lot of pain.

I had recently been diagnosed with endometriosis, which is a painful disease that affects women of reproductive age. But, since everything was unstable in the country, I was unaware of the seriousness of the problem.

With the unrest of those days, the pain grew stronger. I couldn’t put it off any longer; I needed medical care. That’s when I went to see a doctor who was treating refugees there in Warsaw. I understood very little of what she was saying, but I was able to grasp what I needed. That doctor performed all the tests for free and even bought the medication I needed with her own money, without me asking for anything!

How could I not see that, out of His goodness, God was using people to help me?

Was I suffering? Yes. But He never abandoned me.

There is a purpose in everything

Testimony of Ana Cláudia, wife of Bishop Tiago Casagrande

When we arrived in Poland, we had no idea how things would be from then on. But that's how God's plans are. We don't need to understand; our job is to believe and trust.

Pastor Bruno and his wife, Alessandra, welcomed us and helped us a lot. We are a big family, so wherever we are sent, if there is a person of God there, we are welcomed. During our stay in Warsaw, at no point did we lack any support or guidance.

We were accommodated together with the other pastors and wives who came with us. After resting a little from that long and exhausting trip, we started calling the church members who had stayed in Ukraine. Our souls were in pain; it was as if part of us had stayed there with them.

We were worried and wanted to hear how everyone was doing. However, the most surprising thing I remember from these calls, was hearing how much the people on the other side of the line were also concerned about us.

The place in which we were staying was not big, but it was enough and had everything we needed. Since it was a hotel, we all washed our clothes in the sink in our room, and we shared everything.

As a pastor's wife, we have a nomadic life; one day we're in one city, another day in another. So, from the moment we got married, we learned not to be attached to anything and to share what we have with our colleagues in the Work God.

But that present situation required even greater companionship. We soon began sharing cleaning supplies, the iron and the ironing board. Not to mention, we shared personal items with each other, because we all left our country in a hurry and with only a few belongings. Thus, a little went a long way.

At first, I would count the days: it's the fifth, sixth, seventh day of war... soon we'll be back... That was my thought for a while, until God showed us the purpose of crossing to Poland.

I remember Tiago in our room, restless about being able to return to Ukraine. But, at the same time, in a prayerful spirit, asking God for guidance.

That's when he stopped worrying about returning to Ukraine and focused all his strength on the distressed refugees who were on the streets of Warsaw. I remember his exact words, "Let's help the Ukrainians who are here. Let's turn the train stations into our church!"

That was the beginning of the purpose God wanted to accomplish through His servants, which was to bring faith and hope to those people who crossed the border and were lost and disoriented.

We went to the main train station, where the refugees would arrive and wait until they were sent to a shelter. When I got there and saw the children sleeping on the floor, under the deep and sad gaze of their mothers, I was filled with compassion and my voice choked. Within me, I could hear the Holy Spirit saying, "Do you now understand why you're here?"

We were so apprehensive and went through so many hardships on the way to Poland! We felt cold, hungry, afraid, worried, exhausted and so many other things... So, we understood very well what those people were going through. God allowed us to become refugees so we could help the refugees!

Besides having experienced first-hand what those people were going through, we also spoke their language, Ukrainian. Since the local language was Polish, hearing someone speak Ukrainian was a relief for those people. They came to us seeking all kinds of help and information.

I remember a mother who just needed help with changing her daughter's diaper. Since there was no special room for that amid that crowd, Joseane and I helped her change the diaper right there and then.

That's how it always went when we put on the fluorescent volunteer vests; people would run to us for help and we would take advantage of those opportunities to talk about the Lord Jesus. Thus, our work tripled, and I no longer counted the days.

Notice how small our pain is compared to the privilege of being able to preach the Good News of the Gospel! There will always be sacrifice and pain involved when it comes to evangelizing someone, but what is that compared to the extraordinary opportunity of presenting God's precious Word to someone in distress?

Never think that the task of witnessing or helping is too heavy. If the Lord Jesus didn't spare anything in order to save us, why should we spare ourselves?

Humanitarian and spiritual aid

Testimony of Ana Cláudia, wife of Bishop Tiago Casagrande

While we were trying, in a very limited way, to bring some kind of comfort and faith to the Ukrainian refugees, the Universal Church in Portugal was stepping up its campaign to collect and send food to Poland. At that time, food was very essential for those people. However, besides feeding their physical bodies, we also wanted to bring them spiritual food.

That's when the Holy Spirit led us to look for a large venue in which we could gather people. This was not an easy task, because at that time, stadiums and similar places were serving as shelters for thousands of refugees. But, as God was in charge of everything, guiding us at all times, we managed to find a place with the capacity to hold 490 people.

And so, every day, we evangelized at the train stations, inviting people to come and participate in this event of humanitarian and spiritual aid. When we told people that we came from Ukraine, but didn't want to be repatriated to our country, because our desire was to stay there and help them, they embraced us, filled with great gratitude.

We were few in number compared to that crowd. Evidently, we didn't have much to offer, but we did our part. God knew our hearts and saw our willingness, so He provided people to contribute to His cause. In addition to the people who mobilized themselves in Portugal to send food, when the Polish people saw us dressed as volunteers, they came to us and donated food, toys, clothes, hygiene products, chocolates and everything they could afford.

I remember a Polish lady who came to us. Using the translator on her phone, she asked us what she could donate to help. I didn't really know what to say, so she took me by the arm and led me into a small shop, which was right there in the station. She picked up a shopping basket and walked through the aisles, signaling to me whether I wanted to take this or that item. So, she bought food and hygiene products. When she handed me the bags, she had a huge smile on her face, happy to be able to contribute.

Those people didn't know us, nor did they ask who we were or what institution we belonged to; they simply brought their donations. I have no doubt that they were sent by God. With those donations, my friends and I were able to put together a thousand bags with toys and treats for the children, all prepared with great care.

The day set for the event was fast approaching and we didn't have a lot of time left. To our joy, large trucks filled with food arrived from Portugal and, to our surprise, everything was well organized. God even inspired His servants in this regard, because we didn't have enough people to organize everything on time. That meeting was very special.

As I said, we were few, but there was a miracle of multiplication there. It was as if each one of us did the work of ten or more people.

So many people came that we held several meetings on the same day. And we witnessed the transformative effect that the power of prayer and the message of faith had on those people; it was written in their eyes as they left the meeting. The bag of food they had received would be gone, but the seed of the Word of God, planted in the heart of each one of them, would bear fruit. That was our faith.

In the most difficult moments of our lives, it is not our friends, our acquired possessions, our social position or our bank balance that will sustain us. Only the Word of God has the power to transform pain into strength, sadness into joy and despair into inner peace.

At the exit, we handed out toys and we were happy to see so many smiles. Those children had left everything behind and were far from their homes, schools and friends. That's why we wanted to provide comfort and joy for them, even if it was through a simple toy. Those small gifts made them smile so genuinely! That was the first event of many others that followed, which later also spread to Ukraine.

After that, the church in Poland, which did not have a large hall, became too small, such was the number of people who began coming to seek help. That is why it was necessary to open new meeting times. There were several during the day, so that we could serve everyone.

This time we spent on Polish soil was preparation for what we would face when we returned to Ukraine. If there were people in need away from the warzone, imagine what the people in Ukraine were going through! That's why the food collection did not stop. The Universal Church continued to be committed and spared no effort in getting more and more trucks, with tons of food, to Ukraine. They all came from Portugal, Italy, France, Belgium and England.

We learned a lot of life lessons in a short period of time. I left Poland with a different perspective on many aspects of life. We tend to give importance to such small things! We think we can't live without this or that, and suddenly, when everything is taken away from us, we realize what truly matters. One day we go to sleep, and the next day, we wake up with our world turned upside down, with nothing under control. Then, we are forced to see who we truly are. This is when our faith is tested and we have to decide whether we roll up our sleeves and overcome the difficulties, or we give in to fear and retreat.