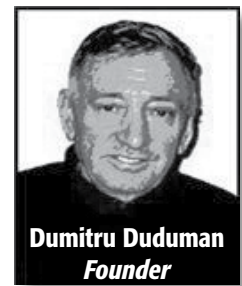


Hand of **HELP**



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Love Thy Neighbor

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THE DARK DEEDS

Thankfully what most of us know of warzones or war-torn nations we have learned from either history books, the evening news or period films. If one has not lived in a warzone or witnessed the aftermath thereof with their own eyes, it is a difficult task indeed to truly understand what it all entails, what it means, and the toll it takes on the average human being.

Because the dark deeds of men can rarely be described by words alone to any degree of similitude, it is also difficult if not outright impossible to paint a word picture of what the landscape of a war ravaged nation looks like, replete with shelled buildings, smoldering fires, shattered hopes and the acrid smells of smoke and fear and death.

If the old adage is true, and there's nothing like the real thing, then it holds doubly true for the cruelties man can visit upon man. If what we know of warzones we learned from history books, it is likely clinical and sanitized, like an operating room before the patient is wheeled in and all the cutting begins. If our knowledge of war comes



from the news, then it is likely broad, and general, and pixelated, not really showing the ravages or devastation because showing anything more disturbing than a black eye or a hangnail may disrupt the dinners of the viewing public causing them to flip the channel.

Last, and likely the worst prism through which we can process war, are the moving pictures, period pieces or movies, wherein the damsel gets saved by the hero at the last possible moment, and no matter how much rubble and death surround her, the heroine's hair is always in resplendent curls with not a strand out of place.

No matter how realistic and dramatic they might be, movies can never encapsulate the full measure of how dark the human heart can become, and what cruelties man is capable of visiting upon his fellow human beings.

We had been hearing stories of how bad things had gotten in the Ukraine, but nothing could have prepared us for what we would soon discover. We had been wanting to do a reconnaissance mission to the city of Chernivtsi, or as we Romanians call it, Cernauti for some time, but we could never find a trustworthy person on the ground through which we could distribute resources as going there ourselves periodically would prove difficult. And so, rather than halfheartedly commit to a cause because we did not trust the individuals



NEEDS OF MEN

involved, we prayed, and waited, and prayed some more, knowing that if the Holy Spirit birthed in our hearts a burden for Ukraine, an opportunity would arise where we could be a hand of help to our brothers and sisters in the north.

While Cernauti is hundreds of kilometers away from the war, it is the center of what the Lord is doing in the Ukraine and the place where many refugees are flocking to.

Most unexpectedly, on a day like any other, the opportunity finally presented itself wherein a group of young believers shared of their experiences in the



The Dark Deeds of Men

Ukraine and asked if we would like to send a team to see the projects that have been started for ourselves, and meet the young pastor in his mid-thirties, on fire for the Lord, who was trying to infuse a little hope in an otherwise hopeless place.

We knew that this was the opportunity we had been waiting for, and so without much ado, we decided to follow in the footsteps of the ragtag team of young men to see the situation for ourselves, gauge the infrastructure and network of this pastor, and hopefully contribute to their work in whatever way we could.

Our imagination could not prepare us for hearing the testimonies, seeing the pictures and videos, and talking to those who had witnessed the effects of war firsthand and some who had left loved ones behind.

To call much of what we saw rubble would be a kindness. And yet, we saw people, young and old, scurrying about the remnants of bombing sprees and mortar



shells trying to survive, doing their utmost to do nothing more than see another sunrise or sunset.

The signs of battle in the east are everywhere, from the massive spent shell casings of some rocket propelled grenades that looked sinister even in situ, to unexploded ordinance sticking out of cars or out of the sides of buildings.



The Dark Deeds of Men



The Dark Deeds of Men

We had to continually remind ourselves that this was not some sound studio, or manufactured stage, this was real life, those were real people, this was real devastation, and even with all that, our brains just wanted to shut down and not process what we were seeing.

What began as a trade conflict between Ukraine and Russia has spiraled into what has arguably been called the bloodiest European conflict since the wars over the former Yugoslavia some twenty-five years ago. The death tolls just keep rising, and tragically civilian casualties are at an all-time high. Officially over 25,000

people have lost their lives, unofficially the count is said to be closer to 100,000.

One need only get a glimpse of what cities like Donetsk, at one point home to just under a million people, or Lugansk look like today, to understand that whatever has been said regarding this conflict has been woefully understated and minimized.

We hadn't even arrived at our first destination and already we felt overwhelmed. Finally, one of the team gave voice to what everyone else was thinking, "What could we possibly do to help in a place like this? What



The Dark Deeds of Men

would it take to even make a dent in the hopelessness?" Little did we know at the time just how much you could do with just how little in a place such as this.

In His Grace,

Hand of Help Staff



Beacons of Light

Some sayings become part of the fabric of our lives because they are undeniably, inarguably true. One saying that has been repeated in various places and by various men for the past three hundred years, is a quote by Edmund Burke that encapsulates the ceaseless struggle between good and evil, light and darkness, empathy and indifference, action and passivity.

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

The same can be said of darkness, the same can be said of hedonism, and the same can be said of desperation. It is not just evil that triumphs when good men do nothing, but so do all the other destructive forces in this world and beyond.

The common denominator in all these scenarios, the one factor that can bring about change, or in the least keep evil, darkness, hedonism, and desperation from consuming everything, is the individual. The person, the ‘good man’ who is willing to give of himself, to sacrifice of himself, to stand in the gap and be a beacon of light in a world of darkness, to be a beacon of love in a world of hate, to be an agent of good and godliness, is what ultimately stands between hope and nihilism.

If good men were common, the world would be a very different place, so whenever you run across a good man, someone godly and of pure intent, it stands out, much like a ray of light in the dead of night.



Beacons of Light

I didn't know what to expect upon meeting Pastor Cuciureanu. The only pre-conceived notion I had of him was that he must be a brave man to work in a place such as Ukraine in the midst of its turmoil.

The first thing that struck me was the joyfulness of the man in the midst of all the devastation. The contrast was so stark, that I couldn't help but smile along with him as I shook his hand and he welcomed us.

His church is not large by American standards, but it is a determined one. There isn't one member of the church that doesn't contribute of their time, or puts forth effort to help the community, and reach out to those in need.

The need is pervasive, ever-present, and all encompassing. While in the States the only time you will see people waiting in line is to purchase the overpriced sneakers of some overpaid pop star, here the people stand in line simply to receive a loaf of bread. Bread! Something we all take for granted, something we go and feed to the ducks in the local park if it's more than a couple days old, yet something so desperately lacking in a place such as this that people stand in line, and patiently wait for Pastor Cuciureanu or one of his staff to drive a truck full down from the local bakery.



Because of all the devastation and the uncertain future of the Ukraine, everything is at fire sale prices, oddly reminiscent of Romania immediately after the revolution. You can do a lot with very little, because most of the people here have nothing at all, and those who have very little are few and far in between.

It only took a few minutes to realize that not only was Pastor Cuciureanu passionate about helping his fellow



Beacons of Light

countrymen, he had set up an organizational network of suppliers, volunteers, and vendors so as to make a multi-national corporation green with envy.

All we needed to do was tell him we wanted to put together three hundred food packages, and in no time flat trucks began filtering into the parking lot of the as yet unfinished church, and volunteers began to assemble the packages on the spot.

If the power of the dollar in the Ukraine is reminiscent of Romania after the revolution, so is the level of poverty, and that specific shell-shocked look on the faces of the people known the world over. One sees and experiences things that the crown jewel of God's creation was never meant to see or experience.

With every story, with every need, with every project and noble work that Pastor Cuciureanu introduced us to, my heart simultaneously shattered and was filled with hope anew. My heart shattered because the needs are multitude, and the things some of these people have lived through are more than I can imagine, but it was filled with hope because the people of God in the Ukraine have banded together and have purposed to be beacons of hope, love and light.

The enthusiasm of not only Pastor Cuciureanu but of his entire congregation for helping the people of Cernauti, the relocated refugees there and those left behind in the

warzone, is only outshined by their passion to share Christ with all those whom they help and come in contact with.

There is something profoundly moving when a stranger not only fills your belly without asking for anything in return, but also fills your soul with hope via the revelation of Christ Jesus and His Saving Grace.

The harvest is indeed plentiful. Perhaps more plentiful than it has been going on a quarter of a century. The need is likewise great, and I believe wholeheartedly that God has been preparing us for this new challenge, for this new area of focus, for this new opportunity to be His hand of help to those who hurt and those who weep.

There are so many areas where help is needed, there are so many projects we would love to undertake and finance, that I felt impressed to dedicate an entire edition of our newsletter to the many areas Pastor Cuciureanu is making an impact on, in the Ukraine, and not only him and his church, but all the churches in the area who have come to realize that clinging to denominational dogma is a waste of both time and energy when you are constantly surrounded by the hurting and the broken. There is unity among believers here. There is a sense of purpose among the brethren, and there is a willingness to stand in the gap and to do the work that needs to be done in order to bring glory to the Name of God our Father.

Daniel Boldea



How Can We Not?

We grew up poor. I think that's why I'm always trying to pinch pennies wherever I can, and see more value in whatever it is that I am purchasing than the price I am paying for it. It is a good mindset to have because it causes you to be analytical about the notion of value as a principle, but it also makes for long hours at the supermarket where I'm price comparing the generic brands of certain products and seeing if it's the exact same thing just with a different label at a better price.

Couple my inherent frugality with the fact that we grew up in a home that doubled as a ministry office and every penny that came in was seen as God's money and as such, not only were we commanded to be good stewards of it, but tried to stretch it to the utmost, and every time I discover that we can do a lot for the kingdom of God with very little in any given place, I get overjoyed and excited at the prospect.

As you may have noticed by now there is a running theme to this issue of the newsletter, namely the situation in the Ukraine, and the opportunity that has presented itself for us to reach out and help.



One of the first things I was told upon meeting with some of the locals in Cernauti was that for only \$200 per month you can sponsor a full time missionary to preach the Gospel in what is essentially a warzone.

“Most of us would do it for free, some of us do, but it's good to know our families can eat and keep a roof over their heads while we are out doing the Lord's work,” one of the brothers chimed in with a crooked smile that accented a missing tooth. “The people are responsive to the gospel like never before, and the current Government is fully supportive of Christianity and Christians alike.”

How long this window will be open no one can know for sure, but when the cost of sending out a full time missionary is only \$200 per month, how can we not? I believe wholeheartedly that it would not be too grand a vision to finance the ministry of twenty-five such men for at least a year, and have countless souls hear the gospel of Christ Jesus.

Could you think of a better way to spend \$200?

As I said, these were just one of the first few things I heard that made my ears perk up and take note. Pastor Cuciureanu also

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works with a drug rehabilitation center outreach which costs a fraction of what it would cost anywhere else to run and operate. The home is run by a couple who were previously bound by drugs themselves and set free from the bondage through the power of the Gospel. The outreach has already had 100 men come through their program in 5 short years.

Along with providing room and board, the men are trained to fix washing machines in order to provide income for the rehabilitation home and keep its doors open. Their curriculum includes multiple prayer meetings and Bible studies throughout the day, and two hours set aside for evangelism.

Genuine concern and Jesus' heart was evident during my short conversation with brother Volodea, tears rolling down his face as he shared not only the stories of endless nights of prayer, supporting addicts through the torment of drug withdrawal, but of the changed lives through the power of Jesus in their home.

The brother's parting words put it all into perspective, "We do not speak of our program's success because strength cannot be found in any program, strength can only be found in Jesus. Our motto and motivation can be found in Proverbs 24:11 'If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain.'"

The coordinators' heart's desire is not only to see those held captive by drugs set free, but to shape them into powerful street evangelists that will bring hope to the hopeless and win over many souls for the Kingdom!

After spending two short days with Pastor Cuciureanu, I realized that this wasn't your usual church leader. Pastor coordinates numerous projects, more than I can expound on here, and committees involved in all aspects of ministry. Most im-

portantly, Pastor organizes as many as 17 crusades a week, reaching lost souls through the Gospel.

There is no question that there has never been a better time than now to concentrate efforts into winning over the Ukraine for Christ. When asked if this window of opportunity for the Gospel is unprecedented in the Ukraine, the pastor with urgency in his voice responded, "I am constantly trying to convince people, the time to act is now! Not only has the door for the Gospel been open, the door has been taken off its hinges!"

Just this past year the President of Ukraine decreed that the 500th anniversary of Luther's reformation be officially celebrated at a national level. The President also ordered that all places of worship that were confiscated during the communist regime be returned immediately.

The building that was once used by the communists to prosecute and sentence Christians to prison or hard labor, is now home to the office that expeditiously issues event permits for crusades! Praise God!

Another fascinating thing I heard was that the church is able to rent out entire restaurants out for \$1,000 and feed 200 people as they hear the gospel preached to them. Yes, \$1,000 not only rents out the space, but provides the food for two hundred people. How could this be? Well, since the beginning of all the chaos, all the restaurants have had to shut their doors due to absence of customers.

Apparently sitting down to a fancy dinner while you hear shelling and sporadic gunfire off in the distance doesn't quite mesh. And so, all the equipment is still in the restaurants, the



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cooks who are usually the owners still possess their skills to put together a fine meal, but there are no customers to be had.

You can call this the Ukrainian version of a popup restaurant, with a twist. The church calls the restaurant, tells them how many meals to prepare, the date and time at which to have them ready, and two hundred souls who have likely not sat down to a decent meal in a very long time can feed both their bellies and their souls. The Gospel is given fertile ground as genuine concern and the degree of the message's importance is proven when men are willing to risk their own lives to take the Good News to them.

"Everything we do, we do with the ultimate goal of getting the seed of the gospel planted in their hearts," Pastor Cucureanu said. "It is good and noble and just and godly to help the poor, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked and to be a comfort to the hurting, but the primary goal of the church, the primary goal of the body of Christ is to preach the Gospel, and we cannot minimize the primary goal for the sake of anything else, no matter how noble. We have found ways to do both, to show the love of Christ practically, and to preach the Gospel of Christ effectively."

If anything, the sheer number of opportunities to make a marked difference in the Ukraine at this moment in time is a bit overwhelming. As I sat down to see what projects we would pray about taking on, and where we could be of most help, all of them looked too good to be true, all of them had a value far exceeding their initial cost.

The pastor went on in sharing his vision for the people of Ukraine, planning on planting over 400 churches by 2021.

The pastor's approach to ministry was confirmation in my heart of something that the Lord was teaching me. Here was a man already doing everything one could possibly do for the Lord, dealing with thousands of desperate war victims, refugees, outreaches, crusades in a country where the need is acute and there is so much to do, yet his vision is for impacting far more than his fellow citizens, reaching out to Europe and beyond by setting up faith-based drug rehabilitation clinics wherever Ukrainians have migrated to. It is this unrestricted by borders approach, self-sacrificing, functioning as a true Body for the Kingdom that we need in this hour. It is not about my ministry or your ministry, our mission field or their mission field, it is all about His ministry and His mission field. What might the Lord have us do together, as one Body, in fulfilling His plan?

As such, I will not ask you to pray about giving to a specific project in the Ukraine, but rather to an umbrella fund we've dubbed the Ukraine Initiative, and if your donation is earmarked for this fund it will go to one or more of the following projects:

Drug rehabilitation construction project

Due to the lack of funds of finishing an attic, the counselors are living in the same quarters as the beneficiaries. An investment of \$10,000 would not only provide private living quarters for those who care for the patients but also provide additional space to take in even more desperate souls.

Crusade Project

\$1,000 is needed for each dinner crusade



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that is held for 200 individuals still living in the war zone area.

Hundreds of stackable or collapsible chairs are also needed for the crusades. They range between \$10-15 each.

Refugee Housing – Permanent Relocation Project

The remodeling of an old building is underway in creating apartments for families who have fled the destruction of the war and are relocating to the Cernauti area. Their immediate need is financial support for the completion of the bathrooms, approximately \$1,000 each, doors and kitchen appliances. Each family is required to take in a few war orphans and raise them as their own.

Emergency Food Distribution

With food being cheaper than in Romania, the cost of a food package is \$15 delivered. Thousands of children are going to bed hungry. That thought alone is enough to motivate us into action.



Evangelism via Media

The local church has created an outreach to the community via the internet. They are mostly volunteer based and run on a miniscule budget. They are creating quality content for all age groups and distributing them through various media channels, to speak the Gospel into the lives of many.

Their most urgent need was \$200 for a new backdrop that could be used during filming of a regular broadcast that would bring a Biblical perspective to controversial topics, leading people to Jesus and their Creator.

Missionary Sponsorship

As mentioned above, \$200 monthly can support a full time missionary's family while they are serving in the area of conflict. Single missionaries are given \$130 while serving in the mission field.

Bible School Project

There is an acute need of workers for the harvest is ready. This project equips those who are willing to serve and risk their lives for the Gospel, with the information and tools they need before going out, in an accelerated course. Finances are needed in order to house and feed the students during their training.

Missionary Training Housing

A permanent solution is needed for housing students and visiting missionaries to the area. Their current need is installing the bathrooms in the facility, approximately \$1,000 each.

Public School Evangelism Project

The most recent changes in Government policy have led to the possibility of teaching Bible study within the public schools. There is a great need for training individuals and supporting them to reach young lives for the Lord.

Special Needs Outreach

Oftentimes in third world countries children with disabilities carry a stigma that keeps them in the shadows of society for life. This project is tailored for the children and their parents, bringing people going through similar trials together, and providing them with a time of respite as volunteers have activities for the children, while the parents are given hope through the Gospel and enjoy genuine fellowship.

We left all the resources we brought with us with the promise to return with more. Not only did we see the need for these

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outreaches, we saw the hearts of those who were spearheading them, and they were, to us, as kindred spirits. Their present philosophy is similar to what ours has been as a ministry since we first began: Do the work of God selflessly, efficiently and wholeheartedly!

Although I have never asked anyone to contribute to the work throughout the many years I have been working with Hand of Help, I would ask that you prayerfully consider contributing to the Ukraine Initiative Fund so that we may help in not only saving lives but also saving souls.

Daniel Boldea



Child of the Month



Adina S, together with her siblings, are among the newest members of our family.

The children were forced to witness the most tragic of their life's events- their mother abandoned the family, leaving the father to take care of them alone. However, after having suffered a stroke and being admitted to the hospital for a prolonged period of time, he was under no circumstance able to provide for his family and take care of their wellbeing. The doctors were guarded in giving any chance of survival. A relative of the family contacted us upon observing such a situation and asked us to intervene and offer the children a chance of growing up in a safe and proper environment. While the older children were either married or working in different areas, the little ones were on the verge of abandoning school and becoming orphans with no expectation whatsoever of having a normal existence.



We visited the family's house and hastily determined that they needed a helping hand. Iuliana (born in 2004), Adina (born in 2006) and Alexandru (born in 2009) are now integrated in our center. Once arrived at Hand of Help, they were evaluated and housed in one of our orphanage home groups. They are living in the same space and could not be happier that they are together.

The deteriorating health of their father continues to bear a lot of weight on these little shoulders. Their desire is to see him well and able to live life as normal as possible. School was a challenge for them as they had missed their classes for days on end during their family crisis.

Adina will start the fifth grade in the fall of 2017. She is a shy young lady and the fifth grade will represent the beginning of a new educational stage in Romania. She will have to face the challenge of being among new classmates and teachers, but she is a very studios girl, always organized in everything she does. She has been able to recuperate a lot of the classes she couldn't attend at home with the help of our teachers and social workers.

Adina finds pleasure in helping around our center and she also loves music. Just recently she has started playing the block flute in our orchestra and we couldn't be more grateful for every step forward she takes.

Please keep Adina in your prayers as she continues the journey toward adulthood. The traumatic events in her life left deep wounds but under our Lord's wings, pain and suffering are given a different meaning. We know that with our Lord's help she will overcome all obstacles and it is our desire to see her grow in Him and understand the importance of knowing her Savior and King.

Dear Brethren,

John 9:4, “I must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.”

I think the reason spectator sports are so popular is because an individual can feel as though they have accomplished something without actually having put forth the effort to do it. If you happen not to live in what is known as a football state, consider yourself fortunate. I live in Wisconsin. I hear some men tell the tale, in these parts, that when we all get to heaven the Packers will be sitting at the right hand of the Father, one step beneath the Son, and that the dress code will include a mandatory cheesehead hat for all who will be chosen to attend the great supper of the Lamb.

The last football game I saw was when Joe Montana took the 49ers to the super bowl. I haven't seen one since. Yes, it's been a while. As such, I always get a kick when I hear someone excitedly say, “We did it!” after the Packers happened to win a game the previous night.

My first thought upon hearing these words is, “I know what the team did, but what exactly did you do? Other than put on a jersey, or paint your face and sit in your Barco lounge yelling at a television screen, what was your contribution to the team's win?”

Although spectators are largely harmless when it comes to sports, the exception of course being the occasional fisticuffs because the other team won, spectators in Christianity are detrimental and counterproductive to the Kingdom of God. Christianity is not a spectator sport. It is not something we talk about, it is not something we analyze, it is not something we observe from afar, it is something we do, it is who we are. It is our identity, our purpose and our aim.

If the Son of God concluded that He must work the works of Him who sent Him, what makes us think that we can simply watch others working the works of God, while we comment on the way in which they do it, or that they're not doing it fast enough, or that they grimaced when it got too hard?

It's easy to sit back and conclude that the quarterback should have been quicker on the snap or that the running back should have sprinted faster in between fistfuls of popcorn. The same can be said of many in the church whose only demonstrable function is to criticize and disparage those who are actually doing the work.

“Well, if it was me, I'd have been done with that project by now,” or, “If it was me a lot more souls would have been won for the Lord,” or, “If it was me a bunch more people would have shown up to the meeting.”

Why wasn't it you? That is the fundamental question that must be asked each time someone prefaces a criticism with ‘if it was me.’

Less than two weeks ago I was having a conversation with someone over lunch when the ‘if it was me’ addendum came up. Apparently this person's pastor had cut a counseling session short after sixty minutes because he had a previous engagement.

“If it was me, I would have rescheduled,” he said, without a trace of irony.

“Really?” I asked, “After an entire hour of you going on about how you have no self-control and how you need to grow up, you felt slighted because the man didn't put his life on hold to hear another hour of the same thing he'd heard the previous hour?”

If I sound frustrated, I guess I kind of am because there are far too many spectators in Christianity today, and not enough people who are willing to roll up their sleeves and work the works. There are far too many in Christianity today who prefer to be armchair quarterbacks instead of putting their hand to the plow and being where they are needed, doing what needs doing.

Knowing that indifference and general malaise are the common threads among many a church and many a denomination, I am all the more thankful to God the Father for your steadfastness in praying for this ministry, in supporting this ministry, and in telling others about this ministry.

One thing is certain: the night is coming! Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, maybe not a year or five years from now, but the night is coming. Jesus didn't say that the night may come, or that there was a possibility of it coming, He said it with declarative certainty “The night is coming.” I for one do not want to look back on what could have been, or might have been, or at all that would have been accomplished had I put forth the effort to work the works of God. I want to look back on a life well lived, and works well worked, and duties well done, so that I will go to my reward with the certainty of receiving all that my Master promised to those who are deemed good and faithful servants.

Luke 9:62, “But Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

With love in Christ,

Michael Boldea Jr.