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Kyiv's Lutheran Church of St Catherine, the focus of wartime Anglican worship

Church seeks priest for arduous mission in Kyiv

Kaya Burgess

Religious Affairs Correspondent, Kyiv

Wanted: one “courageous” Church of England priest. Location: an active war zone in Ukraine. Job: to lead a small Anglican congregation in Kyiv in a church only yards from a military checkpoint and the presidential quarter, thought to have been a target for Russian attacks.

The job is not for the faint-hearted,

but the church also does not want priestly thrill-seekers. It wants someone to act as a chaplain to rebuild the small congregation of Christ Church, Kyiv, back up to its prewar and pre-pandemic levels, even with the war still raging, according to the Bishop in Europe, the Right Rev Robert Innes, who spoke to The Times in Kyiv.

“There’s been an Anglican congregation here for over 20 years and naturally it has been affected by the terrible events going on in the country,” he said. “A lot of people have left for overseas, but the time will come when we want to rebuild and we’ll need a [permanent] priest here to be a focus for rebuilding and growth.”

Innes oversees the Anglican congregations scattered from Morocco to Mongolia and across the whole of continental Europe, all linked to the Church of England.

The congregation in Kyiv has not had a permanent priest since 2007 but has for 15 years been served by a succession of locum priests who usually come for the Advent and Easter periods.

In between, the congregation has been led by Krystyna Laschenko, 54, a Kyiv native, professional interpreter, and churchwarden for the congregation, which meets in a Lutheran church a few yards from a checkpoint where a Ukrainian soldier eyes all passers-by suspiciously as The Times visited with the Archbishop of Canterbury this month.

“Before the war we had up to 30 people on our electoral roll,” Laschenko said. “When we had a permanent priest, we had up to 60.”

The congregation was mainly made up of expats from countries including Britain, the United States, Canada, India, Finland and Nigeria, but up to 40 per cent were local Ukrainians. The worship is

held in English, with services held on the first and third Sundays of the month, but they would become weekly with a permanent priest.

“When the war started, expats were strongly advised to leave and all of them left,” Laschenko said. “I think almost all the Ukrainians left too — only five or six people. Some came back and now we have six or seven.”

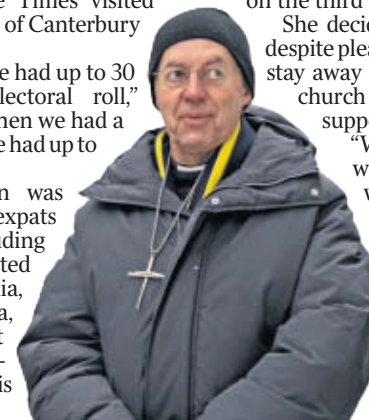
“There are lots of English-speakers here and they have spiritual needs and we would love to connect with them, but without a permanent priest it is difficult to do that,” said Innes. “I don’t think it will be difficult to find [a priest]. It will need somebody with some courage because this is a country at war. But for somebody with some courage and imagination and the desire to serve, this could be a really interesting job . . . We don’t want adventurers, we want serious candidates, not those with a romantic idea of what might be involved.”

Laschenko’s family first came into contact with the Anglican congregation when sending their daughter, Marharyta Stafichuk, now 24, to its Sunday school. She left Ukraine after the outbreak of war to find sanctuary in Switzerland. “One of my acquaintances was killed in her flat,” she said. “She was at home, she was speaking over the telephone to a colleague, and a cruise missile came and targeted her apartment on the third or second floor.”

She decided to return to Kyiv, despite pleas from her husband to stay away from the war, and the church has been a source of support.

“We have a service of the word, we have readings, we pray together, we have music, we have hymns. It’s very important.”

The Archbishop of Canterbury visited Kyiv at the end of last month



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Dog rampage leaves 27 pregnant ewes dead

Keith Perry

Farmers want harsher penalties for pet owners whose dogs attack sheep after almost 30 pregnant ewes were killed during a “bloody massacre” between Christmas Eve and Boxing Day.

The attack happened in a field in Teynham, and barking was heard in the area between 4pm and 5pm on Christmas Day. The dog or dogs killed 27 pregnant ewes in “possibly the worst livestock attack we have ever had”, Kent police said, adding that some were carrying two or three lambs.

Stewart Wood, of Teynham Court Farm, who keeps 800 ewes, said his staff had helped to clear up the aftermath of the attack on his neighbour’s farm. “It was a bloody massacre. The sheep were piled on top of each other as they tried in vain to escape,” he said. “Then we found live sheep under the bodies of the dead ones. The dog or dogs had just pulverised them. It’s a never-ending problem for farmers and the penalties for people who let their dogs attack sheep are derisory.”

The police believe the attack may have been carried out by more than one dog. PC Marc Pennicott, of the rural

task force, said: “This is a distressing incident which is possibly the worst livestock attack we have ever had. These dogs would have been covered in mud and returned home exhausted and we are committed to identifying their owners. The remaining livestock have also been left vulnerable to a further attack, so it is extremely important that we find who is responsible for these dogs as quickly as possible.”

Dog attacks on livestock cost an estimated £1.6 million a year. Wood said: “We found an Alsatian attacking one of our lambs. We traced the owner and went to court and the judge dismissed the case because the dog owner said it was his wife’s dog. People seem obsessed with owning very big dogs but they just don’t know the damage they can cause if they are not properly controlled.”

The National Farmers’ Union has urged the government to increase maximum fines for the most serious incidents in line with Scotland, where dog owners can be fined up to £40,000. Fines in England only reach £1,000.

Stuart Roberts, the NFU’s deputy president, said: “We would also like to see a clear rule that dogs should always be on a lead around livestock.”