

Report trip to Ukraine from 21 July to 28 July

After the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, I saw various actions arise on Facebook. One of them was the action of Andy de Schipper from Belgium. He got into a car on February 25th and drove to Ukraine several times to pick up people and provide shelter. From that moment on I was doubting whether that was feasible for me. Other initiatives also came to my attention via Facebook & Instagram and that's how I met the Metadidomi Foundation on the 2nd of March. This is a foundation of the van Dijke family in Sint-Annaland, Tholen, Zeeland.

Evert van Dijke is married to Anna, a Ukrainian woman, and has lived in Ukraine for more than 10 years, about 25 min drive under Zhytomyr. From this foundation, help has been provided to various villages, schools, and churches in Ukraine since 2007. After the invasion by Russia on 24th February this year, that aid has been greatly expanded to humanitarian and medical (emergency) aid to various regions and hospitals around Zhytomyr.

With an extensive group of volunteers under the inspiring leadership of Rev. Ivan Procupsjuk, these goods are distributed among the people from various (remote) villages who are completely dependent on themselves.

From the beginning of March, I have gained various contacts within the medical world in the Netherlands.

It started with a message on LinkedIn to Maurice van den Bosch, CEO of the OLVG in Amsterdam. He brought me into contact with Yvonne Snel (director of SAZ) and Yvonne brought me into contact with Inge de Wit (Executive Board of SKB Wintersdijk).

Together with the SAZ and various hospitals in the Netherlands (in particular I would also like to mention Gertjan Kamps Executive Board of SJG Weert and his team) we have been able to send many pallets with medical goods, equipment, medicines, etc. from NL to Ukraine. Until the end of April, Metadidomi was able to send 75 trucks with relief goods, food, medical goods, etc. to Ukraine. With a total value of more than € 1,250,000,-. Meanwhile, that number has risen to 97 trucks, 2 vans with trailers, 20 large army generators, water purification, and many other things worth more than € 1,600,000,-.

Some of these goods have been sponsored by churches, businesses, hospitals, individuals, and our own resources.

Many goods are also purchased with our own resources. There is great gratitude that these resources could be supplemented with collections, gifts, and donations from various institutions.

Great work has been done, but much more is needed...

On June 3rd, I joined the great group OMWUA (On My Way to UA) founded by Marloes Pomp. In this group, 310 people are currently involved in, among other things, the transport of refugees from Ukraine and various refugee shelter locations in Poland to the Netherlands. Many people have already been helped, not only with transport but also with shelter, housing, and arranging paperwork in the Netherlands. Humanitarian and medical resources are also collected by this great group of people from the Netherlands and brought to PL or UA. There are also many connections and ties with various regions and people in UA. The lines are very short, effectiveness is extremely high. The drive and involvement of this large group of people are really special.

After reading some impressive stories, of riders who bring (old) people & young children from UA or PL to NL and have even carried out evacuations from occupied territory, but who also bring Ukrainian people from NL to PL or UA, I also wanted to make a trip to Ukraine.

On the way there I could take several people back to UA, in UA I could then go to the hospital in Zhytomyr where we have already been able to send various items and medical resources, and perhaps on the way back bring people who must flee from UA safely to the Netherlands. I also wanted to help for a day in the Tesco refugee shelter in Przemyśl, where OMWUA has also set up its own NL desk. In the run-up to the planned week, there were 2 more seminars about aid to the medical institutions and reconstruction of Ukraine, with various representatives from the business community and government with whom new connections were made. A visit to the embassy in Kyiv could also be planned if possible so that consultations could also be held on the ground in Ukraine on how we could use the aid as efficiently as possible. Currently still looking for a female co-driver, so that women and children who want to ride from UA or PL to NL do not have to get in with only a foreign man from NL. Andrea Duine was asked for this. A young woman of 21 from our church. After thinking for a while, she indicated that she wanted to make time for this. Appointments with her physiotherapy clients have been rescheduled, and the home front was informed about this trip. The trip is planned from D.V. 18 to 23 July. We are going with our own Opel Zafira, a seven-person car so that several people can also drive it extra.

In consultation with Evert, the trip was postponed to 21 to 28 July due to his grain harvest. This way we have a little more time, and we can coordinate everything even better. The Zafira is not available, but Metadidomi has a 9-seater van that could be used. This way we can take even more people back from UA to NL. 08-07 asked if Andrea could also, and that was possible. All current agreements of Andrea and Leander have been rescheduled, but now it is final.

In a hotel in Poland, I booked several rooms for Evert with his family, Andrea, and myself. And think further about what is needed. A flyer was made to raise some money to cover the expenses for this trip:



Unite for Ukraine

Trip NL - PL - UA (Zhytomyr)

D.V. 21 till 28 Juli 2022

Leander van Gorsel
Andrea Duine

ON MY WAY UA

METADIDOMI
FOUNDATION

A trip to Ukraine to help at a refugee shelter
and to bring Ukrainian mothers with daughters
to the Netherlands.

Let's help the ones in need, the world will be a better place
with your help. Be an agent of change!
Scan QR-code below or use link.



How nice to notice that there are also colleagues at work and family and friends who want to support you in this. In total € 1430,- has been collected, enough for travel costs, hotel stays, and expenses in UA. Thank you to everyone who supported us!

From OMWUA I got 11-07 a request if a mother with a daughter could drive back to Zhytomyr. That wasn't a problem. One extra room was booked in Poland. The same day it turned out that there was a miscommunication. There was another mother with a child who also wanted to return to UA at the same time. Is that going to fit? Eight seats of the van full, and then all the luggage? A disappointment was, that due to a miscommunication two people can no longer come with us to return to UA. But now Natasha can come along, someone who has been taken care of by Metadidomi in Sint-Annaland since the beginning of March and has therefore not been with her husband for more than 4.5 months.

A few more days, and then it's really going to happen. Plotting routes, shopping for eating / drinking along the way, asking for last tips in the group, and living towards the moment that we can drive. Evert indicated that he wanted to fly with his wife and daughter to Poland, and then drive with us to UA from there.

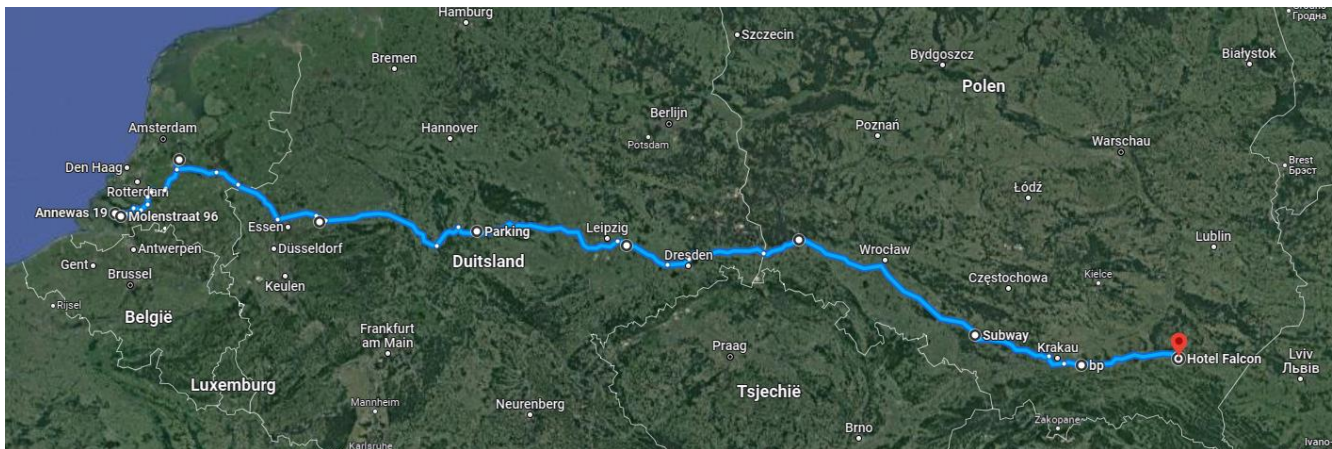
From medical director surgeon Vitaly Khomenko, of the regional clinical hospital, named after O.F. Gerbachevsky, in Zhytomyr I received an urgent request on June 5th whether stents could be delivered from NL. The stock of stents they still had would be sufficient for about one month. Now stents are quite expensive medical supplies, which we ourselves did not have available. Many doctors, cardiologists, boards of directors, and countless buyers from various

hospitals in the Netherlands have been approached with the question of whether something would be possible from the Netherlands. Time and time again the answer came that this is very difficult, that the requested stents could not be purchased, etc. Finally, I came into contact with the management of Abbott via LinkedIn at the beginning of July. Telephone numbers were exchanged, various e-mails were sent with what was needed and finally, the commitment was received from Belgium that a possibility would be looked at to get this done. In order to get the necessary money available, a request was made to the national Diaconate of the CGK, the HHK, and the PKN. From the national Diaconate of the CGK, a very nice donation has been made available with which these stents could be purchased. About one week before departure to UA it looked like everything was complete. A Letter of Request has been discussed and approved with Abbott's management in Paris, the right types and diameters have been selected, everything could be ordered, and with a bit of luck, they could be delivered in Zhytomyr when we would be there ourselves. Until Thursday afternoon before we would go to UA an email comes that some of the stents could not be delivered via NL due to missing registration. And the other stents can be delivered, but with all the additional costs, that would be a lot less than the requested quantity.

Contacted the management of Abbott again, and eventually received contact details from Dmytro from Kyiv. Through his UA company, all stents could be ordered, only they will arrive a little later in UA. Because this is not only about medical means, but possibly about saving 150 extra human lives, this has been chosen. A lot of WhatsApp traffic, a lot of contact back and forth, but what an enthusiasm and willingness to help with this!

There was a surprise in UA that a foundation in the Netherlands wants to work to arrange stents for a hospital in Zhytomyr, but also that people from NL want to come to Zhytomyr and to Kyiv to see for themselves how the help is spent on the spot and to discuss what else is needed. If we do go to Zhytomyr, would it be possible to also come to Kyiv, so that we could meet Professor Maksym Sokolov of Institute of Cardiology, National Scientific Center "Strazhesko M.D"? He also wanted to hear who Metadidomi is and why we do this work, and if there is any possibility to create new connections between the cardiology departments and universities of UA and NL. Partly due to the war, it is a lot more difficult for young Ukrainian doctors and students to gain knowledge and experience abroad UA.

Wednesday evening 20-07 around 22:00 we will depart, Thursday an overnight stay in Poland, pick up Evert and his family, and Friday morning 22-07 across the border towards Zhytomyr. The route as it is currently planned:



Tuesday afternoon 19-07 12:12 an app from Evert: I got sick, fever and really does not feel well. We just have to see if everything can continue and if Evert will fly to Poland with his wife and daughter on Thursday...

Tuesday evening 19-07 22:17 an app from the OMWUA group: the mother with the child are a little bit afraid to drive with us on Wednesday and go to UA, they don't come along with us...

What now? It was thought in advance that we really wanted Evert to be there, because he also speaks Ukrainian, and knows the region and the whole situation on the ground well. What should we, as Dutch people, do in a country that is at war, which even in the relatively quiet north and center of the country still regularly has to do with threats of war, air-raid alarms, etc.?

Maybe just drive to PL, pick up people there, and then go back again to the Netherlands?

Through Maureen Havenaar we had received a request earlier that week if we would like to take two mothers with their two sons on the way back from Kyiv. And after that, we also get a request to take a 73-year-old man with his daughter from Kyiv. Surely, we cannot abandon these people?? First lets have a night's sleep, hope that Wednesday Evert feels better and still goes along.

In the afternoon around 13:00 an email from the Dutch ministry that a meeting with ambassador de Mol has been arranged for Monday 25-07 at 15:00. We are then expected at the ambassador's residence.

Wednesday 20-07: the day of departure.

10:00: contact with Evert: he feels a lot better, but still has a slight fever. The van can be picked up at the end of the morning, then we can put everything in it, and get ready for departure. Early in the afternoon, I picked up the van. Two jerry cans with diesel as a reserve were also put in the van. I checked if everything is present. In the glove compartment was only a paper from RDW about the inspection and registration of the van, a bit of a vague feeling that that is not much, but otherwise, at that point, I did not realize that an essential thing was missing: license plate registration card ... I get on board and drive to Oud-Vossemeer.

In the evening 20:00 (2 hours before departure) a call from Evert: we can't join, just done a self-test, it's corona... What now? I don't want to blow off, but without a good alternative, things get a bit tricky. I was in a bit of distress for more than an hour, but then Evert's answer came: You can go to UA. Friday we can spend the night in Evert's apartment, Saturday and Sunday we are welcome with Rev. Ivan Procupsjuk and his family. On Saturday we can join a group of volunteers to distribute food packages in some villages northwest of Kyiv. On Sunday we can go to church, there is even a translator arranged for Saturday and Sunday so that we can follow everything in English. Monday we can go to the hospital to meet dr. Vitaly, then we can drive on to Kyiv to make the appointment with Dmytro and with prof. Maksym, and even a visit to ambassador Jennis de Mol is arranged from the Netherlands.

In all this development at the last moment, God's guiding hand has been experienced very clearly. With peace of mind, we can say goodbye at home, pick up Andrea, and go to St. Annaland to pick up Natasha.

In the afternoon at 13:00, we came into contact with Tatiana who wanted to ride to Lviv so that she could take the train to Odesa to see her sick old father one more time. At 24:00 we agreed to pick her up in Maartensdijk. A hotel room in Poland already was booked, so that was no problem.



20-07 - 22:01 A quick photo in front of our van, then quickly get in and go on.

22:15: Pick up Natasha in St. Annaland. Everybody is a little bit nervous, but we drive further to Maartensdijk. There we searched for the address but at 00:10 we also picked up Tatiana and continued towards Germany.

The ladies are soon all three asleep, the first hour's little traffic on the way. We have had several stops and the trip is going well. Both ladies talk to each other in Ukrainian. And with us, communication in English is also fine.

21-07 around 18:45 we arrive at the hotel in Poland. First, we take a shower, relax and then eat something. While eating, we really get to know each other. During the ride, there has already been an exchange of various things, but the conversations really go into depth during dinner. What have they been through, where are they going, and what is their background? Why do we as Dutch people do this for people we don't know at all? We soon discover that despite all the differences, there is a common ground: the trust that all our ways are in God's hand. It does not immediately make life and all events easier, but it does give peace and strength to deal with it, also with the unknown. Tatiana hopes to go to Odesa by train tomorrow. What's in front of her there? How bad have all the shelling and bombing been in the past few months?

22-07 at 07:30 we get back in the van and we start driving again.

08:58 we arrive at the Polish / Ukrainian border. Passport control: no problem. Papers from the van: a problem. The RDW paper is of course not valid proof that the van is allowed to cross the border. There must be a registration card, otherwise the van may not cross the border. What now? Just call Evert if the card is somewhere else on the van?

Unfortunately, the card is in the Netherlands at the office. Unrest and a little bit of fear on the face of both Ukrainian ladies. So close to the border and then can't go any further now?

A Polish customs officer is coming. He wants to let us pass the border, so we can then do our thing in UA, but he indicates very clearly that we do not enter Poland on the way back with this van if we do not have a valid card. Evert has sent us a photo of the card, with which we can continue to the UA side. But this also gives some extra risk during the ride, because we cannot prove that we may drive with this van. Maybe back to PL and rent another van there? Just a phone call to the contacts of the Embassy whether this can cause problems in UA. There they indicate that something can be arranged in UA if we are got in trouble. But for the way back to PL, the pass has to be there...

We make the decision to go on and are confident that we will also be taken care of in these circumstances. We drive across the border. Natasha and Tatiana do their talks at the UA border, and we are welcome to continue. Within half an hour everything is arranged, and we are on our way to Lviv. Even with a missing registration card from the van, it is almost impossible to cross the border faster than this. Great is the relief of both ladies that we are going to continue. Just across the border again contact with the home front. We are back on the road again! Please make sure that the card is brought to UA in any way, so that we can cross the border again with a full van a couple of days later...

Right away after entering Ukraine, we notice the consequences of the war almost immediately. Barricades at each bridge. Roadblocks in the middle of the highway. Slowing down, slaloming around it and Ukrainian soldiers keeping a close eye on everything. Fortunately, we are allowed to continue. It's like riding on a movie set, but in the back of your mind you know: this is reality. For 4.5 months!

12:00 We are in Lviv. Saying goodbye to Tatiana is, even though we have only known each other for 36 hours, more difficult than expected. We exchange our contacts, take one more selfie:



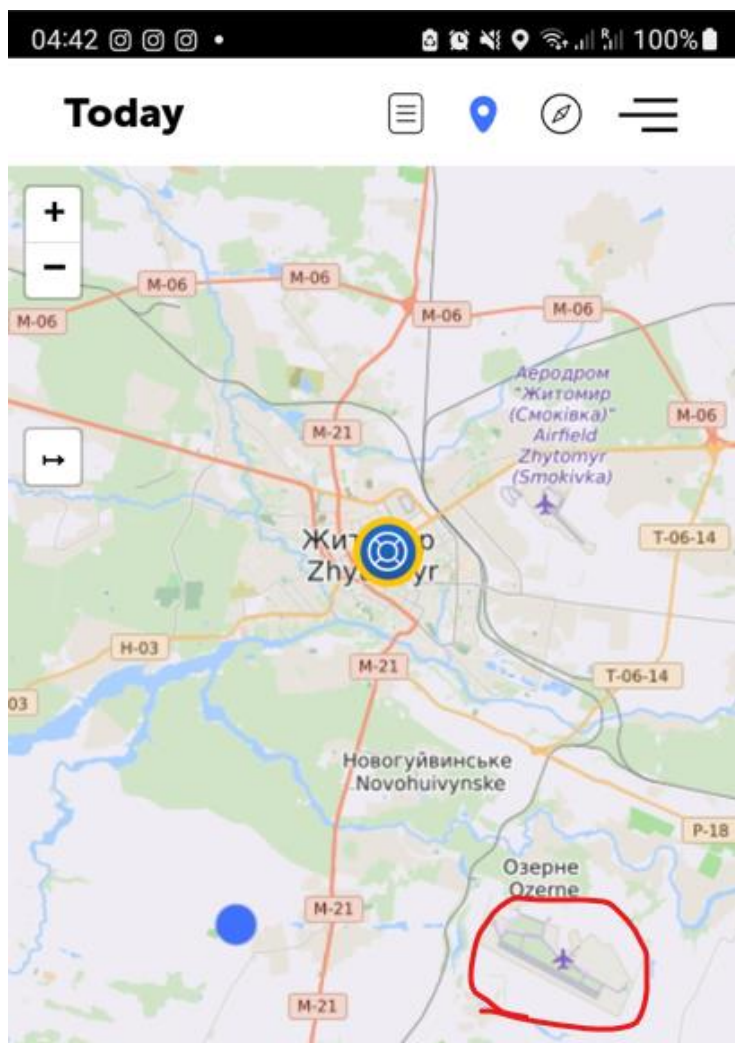
Another hug and we promise to keep each other informed of our onward journey. We drop her off at a beautiful park and she continues her journey to Odessa. We get back in and head towards Zhytomyr. Natasha would also like to continue as soon as possible. The sooner we get there, the sooner she can meet her husband again.

On our way, we are taken out of the queue at a barrier. Passports are shown, no problem. Insurance for the van is requested, but we do not have it with us. Just looking at each other hard, asking in English what the intention is, is not going to work either. Then show the paper of the RDW. Just a little exchange of words between Natasha and the soldier, then we can drive on. How nice that we still have people with us who speak fluent Ukrainian! Hopefully no more delays.

A few more short stops and we arrive in Zhytomyr around 20:00. A happy reunion between Natasha and her husband. She has a whole weekend to catch up and be together. We continue to the apartment at Evert on the farm. We stay here one night. Google maps send us into a small dirt road and through a backyard of a colleague of Evert we finally arrive at our destination. Fortunately, the first part of the trip is well completed!

Evert has been in contact with a Ukrainian bus driver. He was just on his way back to NL, and would then immediately turn around and bring the license plate registration card back to Kyiv for us. It could probably be there on Saturday night or Sunday!

Saturday 23-07 at 04:42 I woke up. Quite a noise in the air. It won't be, will it??
Take a quick look at LiveUAMap, and yes: air-raid alarm in the Zhytomyr region:



There is nothing else to see from the window. Later I am told that from the nearby military airfield all fighter jets are sent into the air at an air-raid alarm in the region. This way, the aircrafts are protected against destruction and can be used where necessary. After fifteen minutes everything is quiet again, only sleep does not really want to come anymore.

Then get out of bed on time, clean everything up, have breakfast, and get ready to drive to the city of Zhytomyr.

09:00 We were expected at the church in Zhytomyr. A volunteer comes to pick us up there and then we hear what else is the intention that day.

09:10 Sasha and Angel arrive in one of Metadidomi's sponsored vans. Sasha is a young man in his early 30s. Angel is a young woman in her late 20s. Angel is our translator for this day. We drive behind the van and go to the central distribution point of Metadidomi at Rev. Ivan's home. It is a half-hour drive, then we arrive in a kind of village where everything is built around a Baptist community. Various houses, a church, and various places for orphans.

We stop in front of a large warehouse, get acquainted, and then quickly load Sasha's van with a lot of bags donated by a Dutch company. The items in the bags are food items. Put on transport from NL to UA by Metadidomi. The bags are good for 1 to 2 weeks of food. Many crates with fresh grapes are also loaded. Very tasty and healthy, especially with these temperatures. Before departure, rev. Ivan leads us in prayer about whether we will be helped today to reach the (often old) people in remote areas with our food, but also whether there is a hunger for spiritual food which is certainly also so important in this time.

We get back in, Angel joins us in the van, and at full speed, we go on our way. The roads we have to drive are full of holes and deep potholes. The closer we get to the border with Belarus, the more desolate everything becomes. After more than an hour of driving, we stop at a roadblock with several soldiers. Sasha jumps out of the van, grabs a crate with grapes to also provide the soldiers with refreshment, and discusses with the soldiers which route we can best take. It turns out that there are still several roads that are too dangerous to drive on. During the ride, we get to know Angel better. She is a Russian orphan girl from Mariupol. When she was 2 years old, she was adopted by an American Missionary. She lived in America for 6 years, where she learned English well. After that, they went back to Ukraine, and she has been living in the vicinity of Zhytomyr for years. It wasn't until late the night before that she was asked if she wanted to join us today to translate everything we see and discuss along the way for us.

We continue again, and pretty soon we go off the "main road" and we cross unpaved roads to the first village. A long street with some houses. Honking loudly, we drive through the street, and people come out to see who we are and

what we come to do. Almost immediately we are confronted with the horrible reality of the war. Several houses in this village have been completely razed to the ground. Total and above all useless destruction by Russian troops.



A house totally destroyed.



A ceiling was destroyed by rocket impacts. The house is uninhabitable. There are no money and resources to repair it.



Angel at a totally destroyed house. The people in the background can no longer stay here. But their mother also lived in a house next door. That house has also been totally destroyed and razed to the ground.

A beautiful blue sky, but only misery for these people.

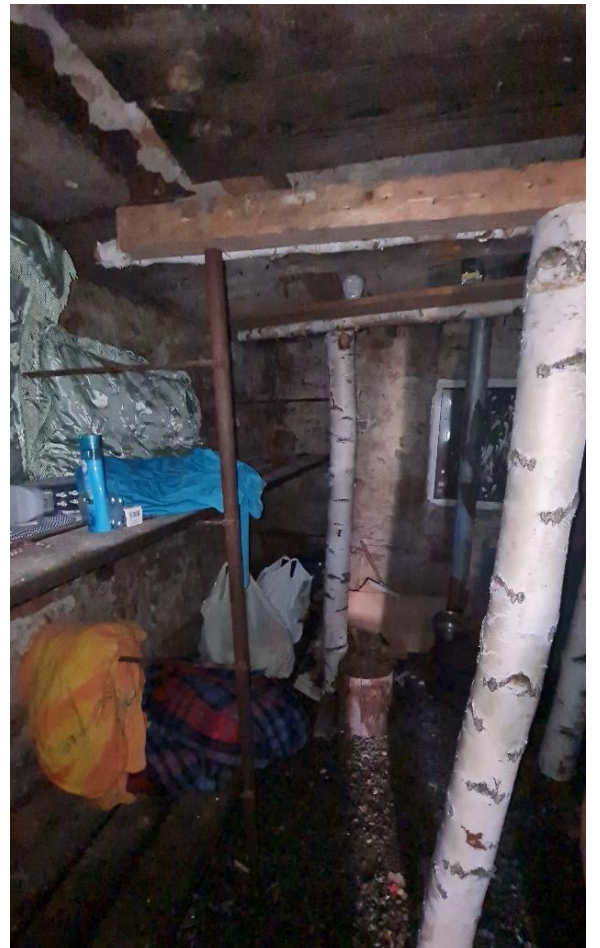


The stable was also completely destroyed by Russian soldiers, just before they were expelled from this village:

The mother who lived here had to hide with her dog in a hole underground for 3 weeks, day and night:



What was normally a cold room to store vegetables and groceries, was now the home of an old woman for 3 weeks with only her dog for company. The horror she experienced at the beginning of March can still be heard in her voice.



We hand over our bags of food, listen to their stories, stand in a circle, and pray that these people can also be helped in the coming months. It is clear: they cannot go into autumn and later into winter this way. During the prayer, we hear the birds chirping in the trees around us. In our minds we thought about Matthew 6:25-34, and Sasha can give this message to these people:

25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

We get back in the van and drive to the next village.

Again, the same picture, all destruction:



An old man in his 70s who Sasha first passed by a few weeks ago was sitting helplessly on a bench in front of his destroyed house. Nothing was somewhat habitable. There was no indication of help at all at that time. Sasha then indicated that help would also come for this man, not knowing where from or in what way. A few days later Sasha was told that another group of volunteers had come to repair this man's roof so that there would be some protection from the weather conditions.

When we came this Saturday there was indeed a new roof on a small building:



Just a little bit of what once has been at this site is rebuilt, but this is already so much more than what other people in the same village have...



The houses have been destroyed, and the fire has finished it off. Totally unlivable.



Remnants of the ammunition that was used to raze everything to the ground. A silent witness of what has taken place here with tanks and artillery.

We drive on to the next village. Here we meet an invalid man who has also lost his house and an old woman who has been spared despite a Russian rocket hitting her garden:



The rocket that hit the garden next to her house could have caused terrible destruction. It shouldn't have been that way. This woman has been spared, and now gives shelter to her neighbors who have lost everything. Having to experience this at that age is actually incomprehensible.

People who can only sleep in a car and a given tent, because everything has been destroyed there too.



They are on their own. There is no help from the government. Trying to provide shelter themselves is the only thing they can do. The gratitude that they are looked after by the church and various volunteers is therefore enormous.

The ruined house of this disabled man:



A temporary shelter in a very small shed is currently the only thing left:



Despite all the misery of these people, we are invited out of gratitude to have lunch with these people. Especially for us, the national dish of Ukraine is put on the table: Борщ (Borsht) And it tastes delicious!

After this excellent meal, we quickly move on to the next village.

Here too we bring the bags with food around, and again the same images. A lot of destruction, many older people who no longer have a roof over their heads, and virtually no help from family. Young men have been drafted into the army, or have served already and many have unfortunately also been killed. Great is the sadness we have heard from these people this day.

Nevertheless, it has been incredibly beautiful and rewarding work to be able to encourage these people, to be able to provide them with a little bit of food, and also be able to give them spiritual food in this extremely dark and uncertain time. Many people indicate that they never had gone to church or have thought about faith before the war, but that in these circumstances they can find comfort and peace of mind and heart by realizing that life and death, wealth and poverty, health and physical or psychological suffering is not in our hands, but in God's hands.



For the few children we met in some villages, we had brought a bag with some coloring books, markers and some candy.



The day is almost over. One more village where we unload the last bags, and then drive back to Rev. Ivan for more than an hour. Also in this last village has a silent witness of the horrors that took place here at the beginning of March:



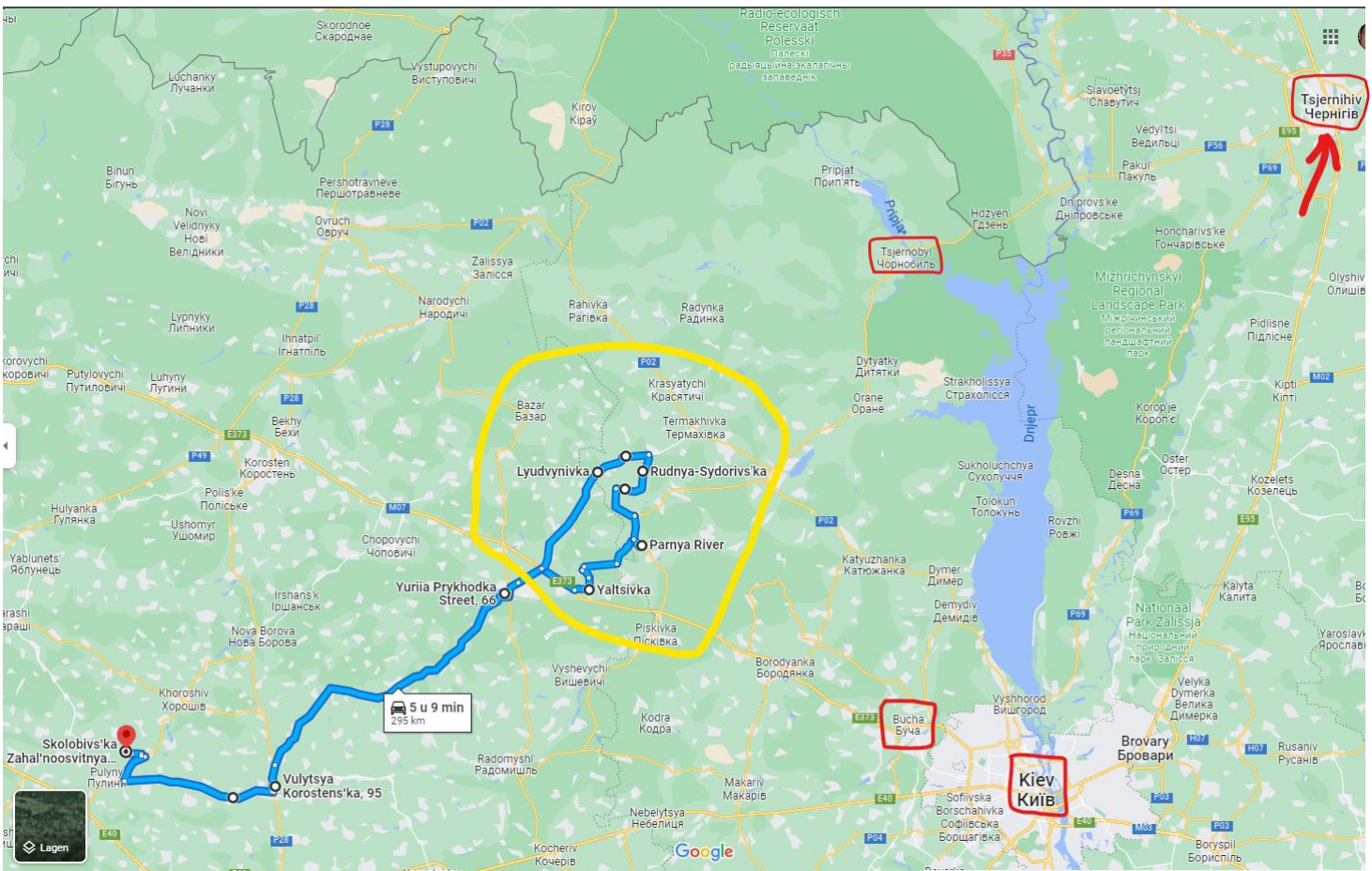
Just posing with these amazing people. I find it very special that we have only known these people for one day, but that the conversations we have had go so much deeper than what I have done in years with family, friends, and colleagues. There is no shame in expressing feelings, in talking about faith, about the things that really matter in life.

However, it is a great pity that a war in this case is the reason that such conversations can be held...

And finally, a beautiful sunset. It is now later than **21:30** when we arrive at Rev. Ivan and his family. What a warm welcome again. We immediately feel completely at home there. We get a delicious meal, and we end the day with prayers and go to sleep. Tired, full of impressions, but still with a satisfying feeling.

Only caring to be able to do much more for these people...





The route we drove to reach the villages northwest of Kyiv. We have been about one hour away from Tsjernobyl and 1.5 hours away from the border with Belarus. Many more small villages and towns are located in this area that also suffered a lot and were badly destroyed in the early days of the war.

Another place that demands our attention is a lot further north: **Chernihiv**

Sunday 24-07 at 07:30 another van is loaded with fruit and other food. Several elderly men are going to hand this over this morning at a military hospital. Many of them have sons who have been drafted into the army, fought, wounded and unfortunately sons have also died in many families as a result of the consequences of this terrible war.



Next to the warehouse is one of the two trailers, donated by Metadidomi, used to bring humanitarian goods and food around to the villages where it is most needed:



We get a good breakfast and get ready to go to church at 10:00.

This is one of the most impressive church services I have experienced. Of course, it is a service in a country that is at war. What is special is that 60% of the people who came, had never gone to church before. Every face you see speaks volumes. Every family is directly involved in this senseless war. You feel the constant tension, but also a certain peace and confidence. The service is just fifteen minutes in and in the distance, we hear the air-raid alarm that goes off in the city nearby. The sermon is about Job who has also lost everything in his life, his house, his business, all his children, and finally his health. However, Job continued to trust in God. And that trust has not been betrayed. The call sounded to look at each other. Especially in this difficult time, something that turns out to be difficult for many Ukrainians. As guests from the Netherlands, we were welcomed to tell why we came to Ukraine at this time. That we think of these people and want to help them where possible. Although we are well aware that all our help and good intentions are often just a drop in the ocean.

Special thanks go out to Marina who has been at our side throughout the service and all Sunday as a translator.

In the afternoon we have a BBQ in the garden with the pastor. Despite all the misery in this country, it is still good to continue with normal life. And even then, you see the determination of the people. No matter how relaxed the atmosphere is at that moment, the conversation quickly turns back to the war, and what everyone experienced in it.



In the evening we had our 2nd service, which was also very special. A family that opened their home and heart to receive orphans was supported by the congregation and by joint prayer. Involuntarily my thoughts go to my own four children who are all safely at home. Living in freedom, no fear of father or son who has been called up for the army. What do we have a good way of living in the Netherlands and what is the contrast immense when you are present in this country and in such a service yourself. It is actually not easy to put into words.



At the end of the service a photo in front of the church building as a reminder for later. Again, unforgettable moments!

When we get "home" we drink a cup of coffee, and I discuss it with rev. Ivan how he envisions the relief work for the coming months. Tomorrow I have an appointment at the embassy. If I could get something done there, what's the most important thing that needs to be done?

Soon several points come to the attention:

1. Aid to the poorest people who have literally lost everything and are not able to bring about any change themselves, remains a very important point (such as yesterday the villages northwest and northeast of Kyiv, but there are many more of these regions).
2. People who are not directly affected by the war in a material sense because their house has not been destroyed and who still have a job, are at risk that the work, and therefore also the income to take care of the family, will be canceled out by all the economic problems and the human sacrifices that this war entails and demands.
3. The relief actions for repair and rebuilding should make use of local Ukrainian entrepreneurs as much as possible. In this way, you also provide a piece of employment.

4. The mentality of Ukrainians is in many cases special. People do not want to ask for help, they hardly want to accept help, but they need it very badly. Helping each other also remains a huge challenge because of history. A cultural change is really needed.
5. Really many people need not only material help but above all a listening ear and access to the Gospel.
6. There are many volunteers in the region. There are many contacts with other managers, perhaps it is good to further shape this into a layered structure, and to work together where possible.
7. Money definitely remains a challenge. Insight into what is needed, and possibilities to be able to offer help are no problem. The past few months have proven that. To be able to (continue to) pay for everything is and remains a challenge!
8. In the regions closer to the front, the situation is even more serious. Perhaps it is better to shift the focus from around Zhytomyr to places like Chernihiv.

We close this session, call the home front, get ready for the departure tomorrow to Kyiv and go to sleep.

We ask if anything is already known about the license plate registration card because in two days we have to cross the border to Poland again ... No contact with the bus driver yet, but it will probably be fine...

Monday 25-07 at 07:30 breakfast. Pack up and we'll be on our way back to Zhytomyr.

09:00 a quick rendezvous with Sasha. We get some goodies for the road, a firm handshake, and a hug and we hope to see each other again in good health.

09:15 we have an appointment with Dr. Vitaly Khomenko, medical director of the regional clinical hospital, named after O.F. Gerbachevsky at the Red Cross street 3. He is waiting for us at the main entrance:



We have often been in contact via WhatsApp, but this is the first time we have met live. We get a tour of the whole hospital. We visit all departments. Everywhere we get an explanation of what is being done.

We arrive at the operating room from Soviet times:



We are even allowed to visit the intensive care unit, where there are some war victims. After the tour we go to an office to discuss further what we do as Metadidomi, and what else is needed for this hospital. Many new and modern operations are being carried out. An example of an operation that has recently been performed, including with Laparoscopic equipment sent by Metadidomi is described here: <https://suspiine.media/264295-u-zitomirskij-likarni-vperse-v-oblasti-proveli-laparoskopicnu-operaciju-z-peresadki-castini-secovoda/>

The 290 stents that have been ordered are being discussed, hopefully, they will be delivered to Zhytomyr as soon as possible. After a good hour, we say goodbye, and we go on our way to Kyiv.

At 12:00 we arrived in Kyiv. Even a few kilometers away from the capital, the devastation can be seen. Roofs of apartment buildings were damaged, and even entire buildings collapsed because of shelling and bombing.

We call Dmytro Vavilov. He is CEO of Medical Conform LLC. A company in Kyiv which purchases the Abbott stents for us, so that the stents registered in UA can be delivered by Metadidomi. Dmytro has arranged an appointment for us with professor Maxim Sokolov at National Scientific Center "M.D. Strazhesko Institute of Cardiology" in Kyiv. Prof. Maksym is chief external specialist of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine in cardiology, principal scientist of the Department of Interventional Cardiology of the National Academy of Medical Sciences of Ukraine, and professor of the Department of Cardiology of Shupyk National Medical Academy of Postgraduate Education.

We receive a warm welcome and a fascinating presentation about the developments in the field of Cardiology, Stents, and various measurement results. There has been enormous progress in the past 10 to 20 years in the development of Cardiology in Ukraine. From a European point of view, and even worldwide, Ukraine is now also among the top countries with technological progress in this field.



Unfortunately, due to the outbreak of war, it is extremely difficult for young Ukrainian doctors and cardiologists to maintain contact with international colleagues. We indicate that we want to draw attention to this in the Netherlands, and we will ask whether the 3 largest Dutch Cardio centers can possibly mean something for various Cardio centers in UA.

We take a picture with the team of Prof. Maxime:



We could remain talking for a long time, but we must hurry up to get in time for our appointment at 15:00 with Ambassador Jennes de Mol



After an extensive introduction about who Metadidomi is, who we are, and how we ended up in Kyiv, we have a good conversation about the developments in Ukraine and about the various humanitarian and medical aid actions that are being developed by many agencies and organizations at various levels. We indicate that we would also like to contribute to this and look forward to a possible follow-up.

We get a traditional vyshyvanka, decorated with various Dutch symbols and take a selfie.



We are going to visit our hotel room soon. Change clothes and eat some food in Kyiv and also visit some sights of the capital of this beautiful country.



Barricaded a government building on the ground floor. With a large banner so as not to forget the Mariupol defenders! Fighters who have made a difference for Ukraine for weeks!

A field is full of flags for fallen soldiers...



In the middle of the capital several anti-tank barriers:



Despite the fact that life goes on, you still notice a certain tension. But war or not, Kyiv is a very beautiful city!

Just refuel and get everything ready for tomorrow, to pick up two mothers with their sons of 5 and 8 years, and at another location in the city a man of 73 years with his daughter.

20:15 we get a call from Evert. The bus driver arrived in Kyiv with the pass. If we want to drive to the other side of the city, we can pick up the pass, and we are ready for departure 😊.

Half an hour later, that burden falls off our shoulders. Probably we will not have any problems with our van, crossing the Polish border. Hopefully not with the passengers either.

Tuesday 26-07 at 06:30 we drive to the first place in Kyiv where we will pick up Gregory (73 years) and his daughter Irina.

07:00 They are waiting on the sidewalk. A suitcase and bag, and nothing else. Irina's husband gives us a strong handshake. A straight face one more wave, and this is the first farewell, of which no one knows how long this will take. With a lump in my throat, we start the van and drive to the 2nd location to pick up two mothers with their sons.

07:35 Here too they are waiting. Victoria (32yrs) her son Artem (8yrs) with their husband/father. Valentina (23yrs) with her son Rosislav (5yrs) with her boyfriend. Here also, everything is quickly put on the van. Another hug, a stroke over the boys' orb, a firm handshake, and tears in the eyes. Again, a farewell of which no one knows how it will continue. The responsibility for these people weighs heavily. Hopefully, we have a safe trip to NL.

We drive back to Zhytomyr to pick up Natasha. After more than 4.5 months, she was able to be home with her husband for one long weekend. Their two children are safe in NL. Yet this also comes to an end. We meet at a gas station.

09:30 we arrive at the gas station. Wait a little longer and Natasha is brought there by her husband. Here too, the suitcase in the van, a hug, and a firm handshake, and this farewell is also short but very powerful. It's quiet in the van. Everyone has their own thoughts. A long time after we have picked everyone up, I still feel the handshakes of the men. They give their loved ones to a stranger to bring them to a country more than 2000 km away.

To be sure, we ask if everyone has their passport, but are told that Valentina does not have a biometric passport. It wasn't ready in time... We slow down for a while, check the travel document she does have with her, and assume that this should not be a problem for the border crossing. However, the tension on the face can be read.

The journey is going well. The border crossing to Poland that we took on our way to Ukraine is now closed. We choose to take the border crossing Budomierz – Hruszów. Well before the real border crossing, there is a traffic jam. We take our place in the queue, but it doesn't work out at all. On our way to UA we crossed the border in just a little more than half an hour, while we did not have our registration card of the van. Now we have been standing still for more than 3 hours and move 1 to 2 cars in line each time. Eventually, we arrive at the border. Now Natasha has quite a few nerves. She has been in the Netherlands for more than 90 days, and you actually have to have a separate sticker from IND to be able to cross the border again without any problems. Now that sticker could not be given in time, because there was a huge backlog. A certificate of registration and all other papers are just fine. After another hour of waiting on the border itself, we can finally drive on. The relief for everyone is great!

There is a smile on the face again and we take a selfie:



We drive on to Tesco, a large shelter in Przemyśl where many Ukrainian refugees (and also people from other countries) have been temporarily taken care of for months, until they can get a place on a bus or train so that they can continue to Poland, Germany, the Netherlands or somewhere else.

Due to all the delay at the border crossing, it will no longer be possible to meet Jay and Irene this evening. We therefore decided to first have dinner at the Mc Donald's. The children certainly deserved that too! Rarely seen such sweet and especially quiet boys. Every half hour they thawed further, their smile grew bigger and bigger.

21:00 The finished our meal and we get on the van and drive the last 10 minutes to the shelter. Our Ukrainian guests are registered, and Andrea and I as volunteers. We get a yellow wristband on, and go inside, not knowing what to expect. There are several smaller rooms where approximately 15 to 20 stretchers stand stiffly next to each other. We are taken to the main large room by a German volunteer who can speak English well. Here burn bright fluorescent beams, and rows of stretchers are ready here with people lying or sitting everywhere. We are referred to the back of the room, where we can grab a pillow and a blanket, and try to find a place where we can spend the night ... Our guests are still talking to each other at the beginning of the room... The faces are very printed. After a short moment, with tears in their eyes, the question arises whether they might be allowed to sleep in the van. There they have a bit more privacy, a bit more peace, and also for the children it might be better.

I understand the request. It is indeed very overwhelming to come into such a large hall. Brightly lit, very stuffy, the smell is not really pleasant, and you do not have to look for any privacy there.

We go with them outside and back to the van. Yet I don't have a good feeling about this either. Surely, I can't let a man of 73 and two children aged 5 and 8 spend the night in a van? I search through Booking.com for several hotel rooms nearby and suggest driving there. A double room costs € 59,- a single room costs € 42,- What seems like a fairly easy decision for us is quite a task for these people. The request comes again if they can spend the night in the van. I indicate that we still have some of our budget left, and that I would like to pay these costs. I make the decision and at 22:45 everyone is tired from the long day, but safely in their own bed in a hotel room.

Wednesday 27-07 at 07:30 we have breakfast together. Everyone is looking good again after a decent night's sleep. To be honest, I could also use it very well to be able to sleep well for a night.

The breakfast also looked exquisite. This was a good start to the day. Our guests could stay in the room until 12:00 or walk around outside. For the children, there was even a small playground.



09:00 We talked with Irene to meet this morning. She staffs the NL desk of OMWUA at the refugee place where we went yesterday. We briefly discussed a couple of things and then were introduced to Sara. A woman with one leg in a wheelchair. She came from England and managed a large group of volunteers with various tasks. What a spunk and what a drive she has!

We were given a garbage bag, with the request to check the entire ground outside for litter. This was with a good 20 min. done. We collected 3/4 garbage bag full...

When we went back inside, we got a broom, sweeper & can, and a bottle with disinfection. All beds that did not have blanket / pillow / clothes on them we had to clean well, disinfect and wipe the floor. Not the most enjoyable job, but this also needs to be done. Soon one Ukrainian man got off his stretcher and started helping on his own. Truly an example for his people! Together with 2 young people from the scouting from Germany and Argentina, we did stretcher after stretcher. Many people also appeared to have left that morning, without cleaning up their blanket +

pillow. Everything is simply left behind. We collected a large pile of blankets and pillows in large bags and gave them to the laundry company.

Around **12:30** we said goodbye. We picked up a stack of SIM cards from T-Mobile for the Netherlands from Irene, washed and disinfected our hands, arms, neck, face, and all other pieces of skin that had been in contact, and drove back in our van to the hotel. There quickly change clothes, freshen up, load everyone up, and start the last long ride to the Netherlands ... All guests (except Natasha) had to be dropped off with their family members in Groningen.

19:00 Wrocklow was on the boards. We were asked by Irina if we would get close to this city, and if we could stop for a moment. Her father Gregory was born in this city and lived there until he was 2 years old, after which he moved to Ukraine. Of course, we want to drive around for half an hour on such a long trip to visit this city. That also resulted in a few nice photos:



After that with a big smile on his face, we get back in the van and continue our ride to NL.

Thursday 28-07 at 00:45 We come through Berlin. It was originally intended that we would arrive here early in the morning around 7 o'clock, but still stopped for a moment, and quickly take a picture of the Brandenburg Gate:



07:30 We arrive in Groningen. The first address we stop at is Irina's sister, Gregory's other daughter with her son. The joy that everything went well and the reunion after a long time makes up for a lot. Yet there remains the lack of the country and the family and friends who have been left behind.



07:45 We arrive at the 2nd address in Groningen. Here Victoria, Valentina and their sons get off. Again, a very happy and emotional reunion with their mother. We drink a cup of coffee here, but then quickly move on. Natasha would also love to see her children again.

12:00 We are at the last address. Natasha is back with her children and brother. Here is also a happy reunion, but the missing of loved ones who have stayed behind in Ukraine is felt. For one hour we have a nice being together with her daughters and brother, and finally, I also go back to my home with my wife and children.

The journey is over. Fortunately, everything went very well. We have been able to do a lot and gained a lot of impressions. Despite the language barrier, beautiful friendships have developed.

The work is not done yet. Much remains to be done. Even in the days and weeks after, there is still a lot of contact.

A very warm thanks to Arjan and Evert van Dijke of Metadidomi foundation for making the van available, for all the work that has been done in the background, and for the enormous drive to help people in Ukraine. It is to be hoped that the war will soon come to an end, but that does not look like it for the time being. And even if the war stops, there is still huge devastation left behind with a very large demand for help in various areas. Hopefully, a lot can still be done in the coming months.

Andrea thanks for making your time available, and for riding along and cooperating during this week.

Ivan, Tanja, Sasha, Angel, Marina, and all the other volunteers in Ukraine who help to alleviate the suffering where possible, thank you for the enormous hospitality and for the very nice conversations. We think back to it a lot!

Yvonne, Inge, Vitaly, Dmytro, Maksym, ambassador de Mol, the entire OMWUA team, and many others who are not mentioned by name now, but who do a lot of work in the background, also thank you very much! I look forward to a long and successful collaboration!

And of course, I also want to thank my family for standing behind me, for having a home in peace and quiet, where there are hardly any worries so that I can also spend part of my time on this.

But above all, we are grateful to God for the health, for the prosperity, and for the conditions we live in. We are nothing better than all these men, women, and children who suffer this violence on a daily basis.

Let's keep looking out for each other.

Soli Deo Gloria!