News
EarthBeat
Ukrainian service members with the 55th Separate Artillery Brigade fire a Caesar self-propelle

Ukrainian service members with the 55th Separate Artillery Brigade fire a Caesar self-propelled howitzer toward Russian troops near the town of Avdiivka in Ukraine's Donetsk region May 31, 2023, amid Russia's ongoing attack on the country. (OSV News/Reuters/Viacheslav Ratynskyi)

Gina Christian

View Author Profile



OSV News

View Author Profile

## Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Ukraine — June 26, 2023
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

At a military hospital in western Ukraine, doctors are drawing on faith and the gifts of creation to heal the wounds of war.

OSV News was granted access to the facility June 24 under strict conditions not to disclose its exact location, provide names of patients and staff or take photographs. The security measures are consistent with Ukraine's calls for media silence surrounding its recently launched counteroffensive against invading Russian troops. Hours prior to the hospital site visit, OSV News staff took shelter during three consecutive air raid alerts in the region.

As Ukraine marks 16 months of full-scale invasion and almost 10 years of aggression by Russia, the colonel who directs the hospital told OSV News that belief in God grounds him in his mission to restore the broken in body and spirit.

"My faith teaches me I need to do good, because good builds and evil destroys," he said, speaking in Ukrainian through an interpreter.

That conviction enables him to remain steadfast as he watches patients grapple with lost limbs, shattered bones, damaged spines, head injuries and embedded shrapnel.

Advertisement

The scars to the soul — including "a lot of psychological problems, post-traumatic stress disorder and trauma," said one major who is a surgeon — are deeper still.

"If you do good, you can suffer as Jesus did," said the colonel. "He was betrayed by his disciples, who didn't even thank him, but he continued to do good."

In the early days of the full-scale invasion, hospital staff scrambled to upgrade the former sanitarium into a surgical-level facility, he said.

Fortunately, support from the Humanitarian Aid Fund of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in America and the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, Ukraine, enabled the purchase of critical supplies such as oxygen tanks and X-ray machines, the colonel said.

A sergeant who serves as the colonel's assistant said she was confident of divine assistance in times of need.

"I believe God helps," she said. "If I ask, everything (needed) will be given to me."

After the horrors of battle, the colonel and his team strive to mend not only tissue and bone, but the patients' connection with the simple joys of life. Psychological treatment and regular visits from clergy are rounded out by art and animal therapy, concerts, and museum and theater trips, with family members encouraged to visit regularly.

A bee collects pollen on a sunflower in a field in Ukraine's Chernihiv region Aug. 8, 2022, amid

A bee collects pollen on a sunflower in a field in Ukraine's Chernihiv region Aug. 8, 2022, amid Russia's ongoing attack on the country. Bees are part of ancient Ukrainian tradition, and beekeeping is a major economic activity in Ukraine, making it one of the main producers of honey in Europe, according to the website euronews.com. (OSV News/Reuters/Valentyn Ogirenko)

The facility's rural campus offers some four-plus miles of walking trails; when soldiers struggle to rest at night, they're given the chance to temporarily encamp with a neighboring army: bees.

Twenty thousand bees, to be precise, said the colonel, who led OSV News on a tour of the hospital's therapeutic bee house, a small wooden cabin with windowsill beds atop professional beehives.

The rich smell of honey and the drone of the bees soothe insomnia, said the colonel, noting that patients are first screened to ensure they are not at risk of allergic reactions to the insects, which figure prominently in Ukraine's cultural heritage.

"Bees are part of ancient Ukrainian tradition," said the colonel, adding that even 30 or 40 minutes of rest in the cabin proves beneficial for patients.

He and his team plan to expand healing resources for patients at the hospital, which is under the patronage of the fourth-century physician and martyr St. Pantaleon.

"These soldiers are fighting for us," said the colonel. "We need to help them."

This story appears in the **War in Ukraine** feature series. View the full series.