

“It’s like I’ve been at home” – Ukrainian refugees gather to worship in Ukrainian Orthodox tradition at Christ Church, South Nutfield



Ukrainian refugees, their friends and host families, had a taste of home on Sunday 24 July and 4 August with a Ukrainian Orthodox service held at Christ Church, South Nutfield.

The two-hour service was the first of its kind at Christ Church and was presided over by the Very Revd Protopresbyter Bohdan Matwijczuk, Dean of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church in Great Britain. It was followed by a community meeting. “Everyone was very excited and happy about this heartfelt event,” said Viktoriia. “It was like I was in my homeland, at home in Kyiv, attending my church, which I had not been to for several months. All those present also felt a part of Ukraine in themselves. After the

service, no one wanted to leave, everyone talked, ate delicious food cooked by local residents, drank tea and agreed to hold similar events in other places where Ukrainians live and visit them. Thank you very much to Christ Church, South Nutfield and the UAOC for the fact that we were able to imagine ourselves at home, to be there in our thoughts, to remember our loved ones, friends, and everyone who stayed there and defends our Motherland,” she continued.

Ola and her children fled their home in Chernihiv district, near the Russian border, a month after Russia invaded Ukraine. She said, “During the first month of the war, my family went through a lot. Now we live in safety, with the kindest

people in England, we simply adore them, our sponsors.” “We received an invitation to the church and visited it with pleasure. We were very impressed by the atmosphere of the institution. All the people are open and friendly. And then there was a service and a speech. How I missed it! It’s like I’ve been at home. My family and I are very grateful to everyone who participated in this. We look forward to the next meeting with great pleasure.”

The Vicar at Christ Church, the Revd Len Abrams, explained how it all came about. “I made enquiries at the Cathedral of the Holy Transfiguration in Acton about how we could, at a local level, best minister to the needs of the Ukrainian refugees who have been arriving in our area. In addition to welcoming them into our communities and inviting them to join us in our regular Sunday services and children’s groups, I wondered if they would like to meet and worship in Christ Church in their own tradition and language, which would be an additional comfort and support. After discussion with our lay leadership, our Archdeacon, and with Father Bohdan, we are offering Christ Church for regular services in the Ukrainian Orthodox tradition on Sunday afternoons. We are encouraging the Ukrainian Refugee community in the area to take on the organising and advertising so that it is

their initiative, with our support. This will involve an agreement between us and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church in the UK. We are very pleased to have received support from the Croydon Episcopal Area Special Grants 2022 to help cover the costs of this ministry.”

The second service was held at Christ Church on Sunday 4 September with 40 Ukrainians in attendance – more than the first service. “The service was again very moving although I had little understanding as it was all in Ukrainian. We are now holding the services regularly on the first Sunday of each month. With the UAOC we have established a committee of local Ukrainians who will arrange future services, refreshments and activities in collaboration with the UAOC and myself. I think we will see a whole community grow up with the regular monthly worship at the centre,” said Len.

