

Pray

- **Ukraine:** The invasion continues. Pray that a way to peace can be found. A new Russian offensive is underway. Now 5 million Ukrainians have fled their country. Injury & death totals remain unclear but the U.N. High Commissioner says at least 2,104 civilians have died & 2,862 have been injured. These figures are likely very low. There are estimates that at least 10,100 civilians have been killed in the city of Mariupol alone. There are reports the Russians are attempting to hide the civilian death toll by hiding or burning bodies. There are reports that some people are being forcibly taken to Russia, including many children.
- **The COVID Pandemic.** New COVID case numbers are rising again in the U.S. The new BA.2 variant is now dominant. Some other countries are also seeing climbing case numbers. Some places that lifted safety protocols, are now reimposing them. Some political leaders are ending mandated health safety measures even though medical experts continue to advise following them. Doctors & scientists are continuing to struggle to understand the realities of 'long COVID' & the increased risk of several health issues in those who have recovered from COVID – even mild cases.
- **El Salvador** – the country is dealing with a serious gang problem. However, the government's massive crackdown on the gangs is raising concerns about brutality & human rights violations as the country's constitution has been suspended; 11,000 people have been arrested in 19 days. Their treatment & fate are unclear. . .
- **All those dealing with natural disasters. Among them:** Those facing the spring storm season underway in the U.S. The west & some of the south is in drought. Arizona is dealing with a major wildfire near Flagstaff. South Africa, where heavy rain has caused serious flooding.
- **Central & South America** – Record numbers of people are fleeing Cuba, Nicaragua, & Colombia due to the difficult conditions there. Violence, corruption, & deteriorating economic conditions in Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, & El Salvador are causing may to flee those countries too. The U.S. & the rest of the international community has not been helpful, often making the situation worse with policies that exasperate or encourage the instability & corruption that contributes to the problem.
- **Victims of Gun Violence** – there have been 146 mass shootings (up from 133 last week) in 2022. The 2022 gun death total is now 12,852. 470 deaths & 1,145 of the injured are children (17 or younger). 178 are injured, & 89 are dead in the last 72 hours due to gun violence. Many states, including Ohio, are weakening gun laws, even though the number of homicides & other gun crimes increases where gun laws are weakened. There are 393 million civilian owned guns in the U. S. – more guns than cars.



When we pray for the people in need in our world, we are praying for peace. Peace is not just the absence of war, it is Shalom – living in harmony with each other & with God's creation. Shalom means health, safety, tranquility, wholeness, & rest – the welfare & prosperity of all. Praying for the needs of others is an important first step in loving people as God calls us to. Next steps include using our time, talents, & resources to help others when disaster strikes, offering comfort in times of need, & working for change when the suffering of others comes from discrimination, persecution, exploitation, or abuse. When shalom does not exist for everyone, no one is fully at peace!

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