

Background for OVT-047: Overture for Engagement and Education with Eastern Europe

This document explains the rationale for Presbyterian Church of the Cross to encourage our presbytery, Presbytery of Missouri River Valley, to support an overture submitted to GA by the Presbytery of Utah.

The overture has been prepared by the Belarus, Ukraine, Russia Mission (BURM) Network, formerly known as the Russia Mission Network. Two years ago, the network changed its name to acknowledge its increased involvement with churches in two other countries in the region, Belarus and Ukraine. Church of the Cross has been an active member of the network since our partnership with a church in Gnozdovo, Russia began in 2009.

PCOC has worked over twelve years to develop a strong and meaningful relationship with the people of the Gnozdovo church, through many personal visits by 30+ members, shared mission projects, ongoing connection through social media, and shared prayer. We have learned and received as much as we have given in this relationship, and are passionate believers in the reality of the worldwide Christian church.

In those 12 years, we have witnessed first-hand the impact of three major developments:

- 1) The hardening of the relationships between our two nations, the U.S. and Russia,
- 2) The conflicts in Belarus and Ukraine, making the entire region unstable,
- 3) The reduction in mission workers and staff supporting our denomination's mission in the region.

The combination of these forces has increased the challenge in building and maintaining connections with Russian churches and church organizations, right at the time when Christians in these organizations are feeling less connected and more isolated from the worldwide church. And now, the effect of the Covid pandemic has been a blow that prevented even the most committed churches from making face-to-face contact.

This overture is urging PC(USA) to support increased efforts to educate our denomination on the role of the church in this critical region through more discussion with church leaders in the region, additional study tours, publications, education materials, and toolkits for congregations, and a special emphasis on engaging young adults in the work.

As one of the more engaged churches in the BURM Network, the Session of Church of the Cross requests that the Presbytery of Missouri River Valley be one of the first to concur with this overture.

