



## Joint DECR-American humanitarian action continues in Belgorod region



April 25, 2015 – A working group of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for External Church Relations (DECR) and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association visited Belgorod as part of a large-scale charity project for aid to refugees from Ukraine.

The project has been developed and realized in the Rostov and Belgorod regions by the DECR in cooperation with the Samaritan's Purse charity and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. In the Belgorod region, the project is implemented with the blessing of Metropolitan Ioann of Belgorod and Sary Oskol and with the direct participation of the diocesan social department.

Taking part in the trip from the Russian Orthodox Church were Margarita Nelyubova and Oleg Kalimullin. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association was represented by its vice-president Victor Gamm.

According to the official information, there are about 14 thousand Ukrainian refugees in the Belgorod region. In other estimations however, their number may be much greater.

'From the first days of the armed conflict, people in Belgorod took close to heart the misfortune of their neighbours to whom many of us are bonded by personal friendship and often blood ties. Indeed, for many long years we did not just live side by side but really felt to be one people. So, people in Belgorod took as their own the misfortune of their neighbours who come to us in a search for help and refuge from the bombings', says Father Mikhail Serdyuk, head of the Belgorod diocesan social department. Thus, last summer when there was a flow of refugees to the Belgorod region, local people put them up in their homes, collected and continue collecting clothes and foodstuffs for them.

The working group visited the Ss Martha and Mary Sisterhood's charity center in Belgrade and witnessed the distribution of humanitarian aid in one of the temporary asylums. The Ss Martha and Mary monastery center daily provides hot lunches for 60 people. During only one day, 533 sanitary kits and 160 children's sets were distributed under the project. The center organizes Easter and Christmas celebrations for refugees' children.

There are 161 people including 40 children at the temporary asylum in the children's health camp 'Yunost' (Youth). Since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine, this temporary asylum has attended to 1590 people, most of them being sent to other regions in Russian under the distribution program. On April 25, the inmates received 118 individual sanitary kits as part of the humanitarian action.

210 more bed linen sets were distributed that day to refugees who came to the diocesan social department. It has installed a humanitarian aid distribution station. The department is helped by numerous volunteers from among participants in various social projects run by the diocese as well as by refugees themselves.

*DECR Communication Service*