

Editors' Introduction: Spring/Summer 2023 Issue #8 – Quilts, Conflict, Community, and Critical Mass

Welcome to the Spring 2023 issue of the *Public Health, Religion, and Spirituality Bulletin (PHRS Bulletin)*, published by the *Public Health, Religion, and Spirituality Network (PHRS Network)*. This issue is the first to use our new approach of featuring guest editors from the [PHRS Network board](#), each of whom has dedicated themselves to the study of public health, religion, and spirituality. We hope this creates a distinctive quilt of Bulletins that address diverse issues at important intersections while reflecting the unique background of each editorial board member. We are fortunate to have Dr. Joshua Williams co-create the first quilt square in this growing tapestry. Dr. Williams is an Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Colorado, a collaborator on the CDC's Vaccine Safety Datalink, an NICHD K23-funded community-engaged researcher, and a nationally recognized expert on religion, spirituality, and vaccination.

The process of publishing each bulletin begins well in advance of each bulletin's release, and the preparation for this issue coincided with the one-year anniversary of the escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. This conflict has captured the attention of the world and caused numerous, pressing public health and humanitarian crises for affected Ukrainians. At the *PHRS Network*, we have grieved this suffering and continue to lament the ongoing conflict and its growing humanitarian toll. Our grief and lament have also prompted questioning. What is the religious milieu in which the conflict in Ukraine evolved? How has the Ukrainian public health system changed in the last decade? What do religion and spirituality offer displaced Ukrainians who have lost everything, including their loved ones? How have religious communities and faith-based organizations promoted public health in this time of conflict?

In this issue of the *PHRS Bulletin*, Ms. Avalon Swenson, a third-year medical student at the University of Colorado, [takes up these difficult questions and many others](#). She provides an overview of the current conflict, reminding us that this is an escalation of a decade-long conflict on top of generational legacies of aggression. Ms. Swenson offers important insights regarding the baseline capacities of the Ukrainian Healthcare System, provides specific examples of deteriorating public health conditions on the grounds, and showcases three public health efforts aligned with religious practice and communities. Discussions with [Catherine Wanner, PhD](#), an anthropologist at Penn State University who has conducted fieldwork in Ukraine since the 1990s, and [Nicholas Denysenko, PhD](#), Emil and Elfriede Jochum University Professor and Chair, and Professor of Theology at Valparaiso University, provided critical insights to Ms. Swenson's piece. We highlight several of their comments in the review.

While some of us will be directly or indirectly involved with efforts to alleviate the suffering caused by this conflict, others will continue working at local intersections of public health, religion, and spirituality. To encourage us along the way, [Dr. Scott Santibañez](#), Chief Medical Officer of the CDC Division of Preparedness and Emerging Infections, reflects on his time working with community and faith-based organizations to promote public health. He reminds us to attend to social determinants of health, engage faith-based organizations as key partners, and work toward sustainability through creative funding mechanisms and legislative opportunities.

Whether around the world or just the corner, there is much work to be done. Toward this end, we provide an updated list of [PHRS resources](#) for students, healthcare providers, public health

officials, and researchers. We encourage you to carefully read Dr. Doug Oman’s comprehensive analysis of [“Mindfulness for Global Public Health”](#), which reminds us that “health professions that ignore religion and spirituality are increasingly out of step with mainstream practice.” Dr. Oman is a founding Editor of the *PHRS Network*, and his review will be forthcoming in the journal *Mindfulness* in 2023. Please also explore links to the [Working Group on Lived Religion in Eastern Europe and Eurasia](#). Dr. Wanner is a founding member of the group, and the group has several upcoming seminars of interest, such as “A Community without a Homeland: Religion, Belonging, Future Perspectives” on March 23, 2023.

As always, we invite you to share this *PHRS Bulletin* with anyone you know who may be interested, and we welcome your feedback on how to improve the *PHRS Network* and expand its reach. As Dr. Wanner noted regarding her partnership in the *Working Group on Lived Religion*, once a critical mass of like-minded researchers join together, their scholarly output and collaborative impact grow exponentially. We look forward to your ongoing partnership as we grow our collaboration and advocate for the importance of all work at the intersections of religion, spirituality, and public health.

Warmly,

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