

## Showing solidarity with the Ukrainian Jewish Community

On Friday 18 February, The Liberal Jewish Synagogue (LJS) hosted an Erev Shabbat service to show solidarity with the Ukrainian Jewish Community. Congregants were assembled in the LJS Sanctuary, but the service was also an online world-wide event organised by Rabbi Igor Zinkov whose personal circumstances are closely bound up with both Ukraine and Russia.

Rabbi Igor's introduction outlined how Progressive Judaism in Ukraine goes back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; cities like Lviv and Odessa had Progressive Jewish communities long before us. However, after a major decline as a result of World War II, the Holocaust and anti-religious Soviet policy, there was a renaissance in Progressive Judaism following the break-up of the Soviet Union, with the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ) playing a major role in this.

The guest speaker was Rabbi Julia Gris who serves the Progressive Community in Odessa, Shirat ha-Yam, and who has dedicated her life to the development of Progressive Judaism in the former Soviet Union. Rabbi Julia told us how the hundreds of letters of support she has received from countless congregations mean a great deal to her. She took us through the development of her community from small beginnings in the year 2000, to the rich cultural and educational programme for all ages which the community now enjoys – a community keen to fulfil its potential. She expressed her deep gratitude for the support being given, and her moving talk ended with a prayer for international understanding.

The service continued with a heartfelt contribution from Rabbi Dr René Pfertzel, Co-Chair of the Conference of Liberal Rabbis and Cantors, a former classmate of Rabbi Julia's from the time when she had come to London to study at the Leo Baeck College, leading to her ordination in 2014. Rabbi René talked of how surreal it felt for there to be the prospect of war in Europe, asking how it was possible that lessons from the past had not been learned... He spoke warmly of Rabbi Julia and her work with her community, and offered support in any way that was possible. These sentiments were then echoed by Rabbi Sergio Bergman, President of the World Union of Progressive Judaism, who stood in solidarity with the Jews of Ukraine. He said this was a time to act, and encouraged donations to the special fund set up by WUPJ to support the emergency in Ukraine: [www.wupj.org/give/ukraine](http://www.wupj.org/give/ukraine). He wishes the Jewish community in Ukraine to know we are united with them, and stand in solidarity with them.

Judith King