

News from the vicar provincial of Ukraine, Jarosław Krawiec OP
(electronic translation)

22.02.2022

We are all certainly moved and very concerned by the recent events in Ukraine. We, the Dominican friars of the Vicariate of Ukraine, are receiving many expressions of solidarity, sympathy, cordial and anxious questions about our situation and declarations of readiness to help. We are very grateful for these. It was these conversations, e-mails and text messages that encouraged me to write a few words to you.

Like everyone else, we follow the news with concern. In Ukraine, the media try not to sow panic, showing Russia's aggression (military, disinformation, various sabotage actions, cyber attacks), but also the calm reaction of the Ukrainian authorities, indicating, among other things, that the Ukrainian army is not as weak as it was in 2014, when the Russian-Ukrainian war in Donbass actually started. It is also clear that there is a great readiness in Ukraine to defend its own country.

In the places where we have our monastery life goes on normally, although the further east of Ukraine there is more uncertainty. I am thinking in particular of Kharkiv, Kiev and Fastovo. The dates of a possible military incursion by Russian troops, evacuations of consecutive diplomatic missions from Kiev and even from Ukraine, as recently reported in the media (let us add that both the Polish ambassador and the apostolic nuncio were fortunately not going anywhere! Breaking away from reading more news on the computer or smartphone and going out into the streets where normal life was going on, or going into a shop to see the shelves full, certainly calmed things down a bit.

We try to run our ministry normally, because this normality is much needed in abnormal times. In Kiev we are waiting for several dozen participants of weekend liturgical singing workshops which will be conducted by Mr Paweł Bębenek in a few days at the walls of our St. Thomas Institute. We hope that nothing will hinder these plans and the participants will arrive safely from various parts of Ukraine, including Crimea.

Since many of us cannot remain indifferent in the face of human misery and you ask how you can help us, I would like, together with Fr Misha Romaniv, to propose that you join in the concrete help that we have been providing for several days at the House of St Martin de Porres in Fastovo. When serious acts of military aggression by Russia began and the danger of war appeared, Fr Misha wrote a letter to various people and institutions operating in the so-called grey zone, i.e. on the border with the separatist republics of Donbass, and declared that if things got bad, he would try, together with the team of St Martin's House, to find them a safe roof over their heads. In a few days' time, a request for help came from Mr and Mrs Oksana and Mr Volodymyr Zawadzki, a lay volunteer couple who run, as part of the Christian Rescue Service, the "Ark" centre for children and young people in Pionierski near Mariupol. This centre is located a few kilometres from the border and was shelled on 19 February, and now 5 km. from Pionierski there are tanks and rocket systems on the separatists' side.

A second group of children and young people from "Ark" is about to arrive in Fastovo from Mariupol. This means that we will receive under our roof in Fastovo a total of 30 people aged from 3 to 18 years with guardians. We are ready to accept another 20 people who will

probably appear soon, and in case of a really dramatic situation, even to double this number. In addition to a roof over their heads, we provide daily meals for all of them. Younger children will join the primary school run by the St Martin's Centre and older children will be accepted into schools in the city. In addition, we provide what we can offer at the St. Martin's House, i.e. psychological support, therapeutic activities, massage, hydrotherapy, various workshops. We do not know how long the children and youth from Pionierski will stay in Fastów.

We invite and encourage you to materially support their stay in the St Martin's House. Adapting our rooms to accommodate such a number of guests, as well as providing them with full board, paying gas, light, water, medicine and clothing bills is already a considerable expense. Lent is about to begin. Perhaps, then, a form of almsgiving for ourselves, our friends or acquaintances (or for our communities) could be to support these victims of war? It would be our common Dominican response to the plight of concrete people.

Material support can be sent to the account serving St Martin's House:

Mission Secretariat of the Dominican Fathers

10 Freta St., 00-227 Warsaw

PL 02 1090 2851 0000 0001 0580 2728

with the note: Children from Mariupol

Thank you sincerely for your prayers. I really like the initiative of Fr Norbert Oczkowski to pray the rosary for peace every day at 21:00 (you can also join this prayer on YouTube channel Dominikanie.pl or through Facebook). As the late Fr Feliks Bednarski OP often said in his farewell to his brothers, oremus pro invicem, that is, let us pray for one another.

With cordial and fraternal greetings from Kiev,

o. Jarosław Krawiec OP

24.02.2022

Dear Sisters, Dear Brothers,

writing to you yesterday I mentioned "normality", which came to an end in the morning. Before 5 a.m. I was woken up by a phone call from Fastovo from Misha Romaniwa and his question: how are things in Kiev? Explosions could be heard in Fastovo as Russian troops were bombing an air force base located in Vasylkovo (between Fastovo and Kiev). In our place there was complete peace and quiet. In the morning I went to celebrate Holy Mass at the Carmel. The journey, which usually takes 25 minutes, took almost an hour and only because google led me along side roads. The sisters have a convent on the outskirts of town. The Eucharist in such circumstances does indeed bring peace. The sisters, of whom there are five at the moment, said they had decided to stay in Kiev and pray. I hope that in the next few days we will be able to reach them to celebrate Mass.

In the morning, apart from traffic jams, there were long queues at every ATM, as well as in front of petrol stations and some shops. Last night Mr Paweł Bębenek, a musician and composer, flew from Kraków to Kiev. Of course, there will not be any, and after a long search we found the last train tickets so that Mr Bębenek could return to Poland and his family with a change of trains. Providence is watching over us, because on our way to

Fastovo, from where Paweł was supposed to have a train, we stopped at the embassy to pick up some things for the kids from St. Martin's House. It turned out that a group of Poles was just forming a column of cars and they were moving towards Poland. The Ambassador helped to find a seat in one of the cars and Mr. Bębenek is already on his way (a long one, I'm sure) to Poland, if only he arrives safely. Traffic jams disappeared from the streets in the city centre. An ominous emptiness...

We are preparing a cellar in our Kiev monastery. It may be necessary, seeing what's happening around. Tomek Samulnik has just gone to stand in a long queue to refuel his car. He has just called to say that they only sell 20 litas each, but fortunately it is possible to buy it.

Before noon I spoke again with Fr. Ireneusz Pogoreltsev, who is in Kharkov. He says that we don't hear or see bombardments, but some of the parishioners came to the monastery asking to stay with us. Irik stated firmly (and he is now alone in the monastery) that he is staying with them. There is fighting around Kharkiv.

In Khmel'nitsky in the morning we could hear planes. Yakub Nesterovich said that the Russians had bombed the military airfield near the city. Father Igor Gnius said that in Lviv, apart from the morning sirens and police announcements, it was quiet. In the morning, in the Lviv cathedral where Igor went to confession there were more people than usual. In Chortkiv it was quiet.

Misha Romaniv is organising food and what he can for all the people who are in Fastovo. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you very much for your kind response to my letter of yesterday and for your support for the maintenance of children from Mariupol. These funds will come in very handy. A while ago Misha told me that a third group of children from those parts is being organised, but they have problems with leaving. Perhaps a group of a dozen or so children from an orphanage in Donbass, who have been in contact in recent days, will also come to Fastovo. There are no military units in Fastovo, so let us hope that no one will think of attacking this town.

Please pray for us. For the time being the phones and internet are working, but there is no telling what might happen next. I will try to bring you daily updates as much as possible. Sorry I can't keep up with replying to all the private notifications.

Best regards,

Jarek

26.02.2022

Dear Sisters, Dear Brothers,

I recently returned from shopping - I managed to find an open market in the area, because generally in Kiev almost everything is closed, so I sit down to describe what is happening here.

It promised to be a difficult and dangerous night in the Ukrainian capital. Fortunately, the warnings about possible mass bombings were not confirmed, although there was fighting in various parts of the city, both with heavy equipment and street shooting. There was also a lot of fighting in the vicinity of Kiev, including in the Vasylkov area, i.e. in the Fastov direction. When we finished tomorrow morning there were reports that the city was 'clean'

and the enemy had been successfully chased away. We can also hear now, when I sit at the computer, from time to time some explosions from afar.

This morning and day is sunny, encouraging us to leave the house, although walking is not very advisable due to the possibility of falling under fire. However, if there is something important to do outside, one must act. Brothers Oleksandr and Tomasz went to donate blood in the morning. If we manage to get to the centre and the cathedral, we will pick up the medical kits that the bishop's curia distributes to priests. Unfortunately, although we have a doctor among the people who live with us, we do not have many medical supplies in case they are needed.

There are some people on the streets of Kiev. A lot of them with guns too - they check documents, especially men, and cars. I passed one such checkpoint on my way to the shop. There are also women among those defending Kyiv - at this checkpoint there was one beautiful young Ukrainian woman with a rifle on her shoulder. But I was just being checked by an older, bearded man. The Polish passport, however, does not arouse any suspicion, and in the current situation, rather sympathy. The metro has been turned into a shelter and runs only for a short time during the day. For the time being, there is communication (telephones and internet), water, light and gas.

Some of us, including me, spent the night in the basement. Our monastery has two basements which are also pastoral rooms, so the standard is not bad. At the moment, one of the basements is for the women who are staying with us, and the other is for us and other men. This is because several people associated with us have asked to be able to stay with us temporarily because they live in dangerous areas of the city, either alone or in shabby buildings with no access to cellars or shelters. Our "war community" thus expanded radically.

In Fastovo, street shootings took place at night. Ukrainian local forces were cracking down on Russian saboteurs, also in the vicinity of our monastery. Therefore, some people hid in the chapel under the church. Father Misha is in contact with the local authorities, who try as much as possible to ensure safety in our area, knowing, after all, that St Martin's House is now a temporary home for many people, including children who have taken refuge from danger.

A group of 30 children from Mariupol left yesterday for Poland, where one of the parishes will receive them, but another "thirty" from the Donetsk region have arrived. The youngest of them, David, is only 16 days old and comes from the village of Zaitsevo (Zhovanka) near Bakhmut in the Donetsk region. People fleeing Kiev, including a foreign doctor and a first aid instructor from the Red Cross, have also found shelter in Fastovo, so they are training people at the St Martin's Centre. The brothers and sisters are holding up well. If conditions allow and it is safe to get to Fastovo by car, I will want to go there soon to visit the brothers, taking the opportunity to bring the aid that was stuck with us in Kiev a few days ago. It is difficult to say if and when this will be possible and safe.

Father Ireneusz and a group of parishioners left Kharkiv the day before yesterday for Jazlovets (near Chortkiv, western Ukraine). They arrived safely and he told me that they plan to go to Transcarpathia. I have just spoken to our brother Bishop Nikolai. He greets you all very warmly! He is praying a lot for peace - yesterday they held a half-night vigil in the cathedral, but he is also organising a place to receive people fleeing the war. He wants to write a letter to his diocesans, asking for their kindness in accepting war refugees in their homes. There has been no warfare in Transcarpathia so far.

Lviv was relatively quiet, although at night there were also sirens warning of a possible attack. In the evenings the streets were empty, which for Lviv is something completely abnormal. In Chortkiv it was also quiet. I spoke to Father Julian Rozycki, who was on his way to church to celebrate midday Mass, and he said that there were also far fewer people on the streets and some shops were closed. All is quiet in Khmelnytsky. It was possible, although the journey took some time, to return to Khmelnytsky for Father Vladimir, who had gone to Poland before the outbreak of war. Father Jakub Nesterowicz says that a lot of people volunteer to join the army to defend the Homeland, including young people from our pastoral ministry.

Thank you so much for your prayers and all the words of support and solidarity. We try to respond, but it is not always possible to keep up with the number of emails, notifications and phone calls. Thank you for being with us and helping Ukraine in various ways. Also materially. Your sensitivity, compassion and generosity are reflected in our bank account balances. The funds are already coming in handy: at least there is money to buy things for all those who are with us, because the possibility to pay by bank card still works. It is a mundane matter, but one that is important to us at the moment, and you are doing good for the people who find themselves at war. Please also do what you can to help the Ukrainians who have taken refuge in Poland. Ukraine is no longer letting men of conscription age go abroad, so women themselves, especially with children, need your support.

We greet you all warmly and commend ourselves to the care of the Protector of our Order, St. Jack, and St. Michael the Archangel, who is the patron of our Dominican Vicariate of Ukraine.

Jarosław Krawiec OP

Kiev, February 26, 2022 at 12:00 pm

27.02.2022

Dear Sisters, Dear Brothers,

I didn't go out today because it's forbidden to go out on the streets of Kyiv since yesterday at 17:00 till Monday at 08:00. Only in the morning I watched through the bars of the gate the deserted Derevljanska Street and the intersection near us. A few empty buses passed by, about two ambulances. It hurt my heart to see parents holding their two small children tightly by the hands, dragging small suitcases. My guess is that they were returning to their flat after a night in a shelter or basement. There has been an air alert in Kiev since yesterday - people are encouraged to sit in safe places. Many are taking shelter in metro stations - anyone who has been to Kiev knows that they are very deep, including the one near our monastery. There are supposedly screens and cartoons on the platforms to help children through this difficult time. Unfortunately, there are no toilets at most stations, only the floor on the platforms and in the passageways.

Opposite our monastery and my windows is a block of flats. Yesterday, no lights were on in the windows after 10 p.m. - usually almost all the lights are on. Only here and there one could see some signs that someone was inside. And voices of people from behind the fence, who were probably standing at the entrance to the cellar. A lot of people have left Kyiv, and those who stayed, follow the recommendations of the authorities to be in the dark at night.

The night passed quietly at our place. The neighbourhood was relatively quiet. Again, some of us slept in the cellars, some in our rooms. But all the time during the day we could hear gunshots. Once closer, once further away from us. I have just stopped writing and went out to the courtyard, because it became "louder", but a man from the security company, sitting on the gatehouse, went to me and advised not to accidentally go out into the street, because there is fighting not far from us. Apparently, a street away the territorial defence has its "base" and a few of our "boys" have just been wounded... that's how adult men are referred to here as well. And this is no pejorative term, and in the current situation all the more so when uttered by young and old: "our boys" carries great respect for their courage and pride. Indeed, the shots seem to be coming from not far away.

It was not quiet in Fastów either. At night we could hear fighting for the airfield in Wasylkow, 40 km away, and the wind carried the stench of fuel from the burning paraffin depot. Almost everyone went down to the shelter, which is a chapel under the church. Not only our fathers and lay volunteers of St. Martin's House but also Dominican missionary sisters "from Zielonka" are bravely staying in Fastów. Their convent is located right next to the church. The sisters minister in the parish, catechise, work with children in the St. Martin's Centre. And today they do whatever it takes, which is to serve others with their lives with courage and love.

Just now a parishioner of mine from Chortkiv called. He lives in Oryszkowce, a village that belongs to our parish. He said that at night there was also an alarm, Ukrainian planes were flying over them, and two suspicious people from the Lugansk area were caught in the village with some flares in their rucksacks. She and her family pray a lot, and the children themselves encourage their parents to pray. Clearly, they understand with their hearts what is important! Marek at the end of our conversation stated: "With us God, for behind us truth". It is difficult to say it more simply and truthfully.

The problem of Russian saboteurs spreading not only in Kiev or Fastovo but also in other places of Ukraine is serious.

Today I would like to write to you that, for me, this last Sunday in February and the first Sunday of the war, is a day of gratitude. Fr Misha Romaniv has shared some happy news with us. I mentioned yesterday that the youngest resident of St. Martin's House is now David, who is "eighteen" today. Eighteen days ago he was born in the Donetsk region. I think of him as David of St Martin. The biblical David defeated Goliath with a stone from a sling. Ukraine today is such a David standing bravely, courageously and hopefully against Goliath. Together with his mother, Dawid fled the war to Fastów, and today, during Holy Mass, he was baptised. Deo gratias!

The second reason for gratitude is the immense goodness I see in the messages, emails, phone calls, text messages from our Dominican brothers and sisters, Tertiaries and people from all over the world. I am convinced that it crushes the power of the enemy and the prince of darkness, just like the sun which is not missing over Kiev today.

Browsing through photos on my phone, I found photographs from an exhibition by the American documentary filmmaker Julien Bryan, known in Poland for his poignant pictures of Warsaw in the first days of the war in September 1939. A few months ago, his photographs of Ukraine from 1930-1958 were shown in the centre of Kiev and in Fastovo. The exhibition opened with the quote: "Wherever I went, I very quickly discovered that when you break bread with people, share their problems and joys, linguistic, political and religious barriers quickly disappear. I loved them and they loved me. That was all that mattered" - these were Julien Bryan's words written in 1951.

Dear friends in Poland and around the world, thanks to you, who help the aching Ukraine with great sacrifice, I proudly display my Polish passport on the streets of struggling Kiev! Today, many of you are breaking bread with refugees from Ukraine in your Polish homes, parishes and centres. Today, for many of you, linguistic, political and religious divisions have disappeared. Today, many of you are healing with love the wounds inflicted by the madness of tyrants. Thank you for being here! Thank you to all my brothers and sisters in white habits, to the lay Dominicans, to my family, friends and acquaintances and to the countless people of great heart who rush to my aid and prayers.

With warm greetings from struggling Kiev!

Jaroslaw Krawiec OP

Kiev, 27 February 2022, 15:30

28.02.2022

Dear Sisters, Dear Brothers,

a little bit out of tiredness and a little bit in the hope of sleeping through the night without the snoring of my "companions in misery", I decided to sleep in my cell and in my bed. It was a good choice. I fell asleep late anyway, and at 5:30 I was awakened by the sounds of gunfire, which lasted a few minutes. They were quite loud, so probably something was going on near our monastery. However, I managed to continue falling asleep, and even overslept for tomorrow morning prayer with the friars. Sleep is now a "scarce commodity" for many, if not all people in Ukraine. Hardly anyone is able to sleep through the night. The brothers who know me, know that I like to take a nap during the day and sleep normally at night. Now, even at night, it is difficult to get a decent night's sleep. One of the brothers, who is heavily involved in helping people, said that he had to force himself to eat. So far I am looking at it with the hope of losing a few kilos. Putin has given all of us living here a wartime "miracle diet".

From 8:00 in the morning it was finally possible to take to the streets of Kiev after a 38 hour curfew. So we set off in search of open shops to replenish our food supplies. The beautiful sunny morning and the life on the streets were uplifting! I managed to get to a market next to a nearby metro station. Crowds of people inside. Surprisingly, I managed to get a few loaves of fresh bread. It is not easy with this. You had to stand in a queue for almost an hour. Even a homeless man, whom I let pass (with other people's permission, of course) because he was very confused by the situation, said that it was like being in the "Soviets Soyuz". Thank you for supporting us financially, because at the moment we don't have to worry at least about what to buy for us and the people who have taken shelter under the monastery roof. By the way, the homeless man has also benefited from your "good hearts" today. Of course, there are soldiers with guns or volunteers guarding Kiev - not to scare, but to do some shopping. The shops are also guarded by the army, because they are potential places where sabotage could take place.

Together with a few people who had taken refuge with us, we got in the car and drove to the city centre. I to the cathedral to finally pick up a set of medicine distributed to the priests by the bishop's curia, and the ladies to pick up some needed personal items from their flats. Today, there was no one at the morning mass in St Alexander's Cathedral in Kiev. Yesterday it was the same, because people were not allowed to leave their homes. At noon,

when I went to the cathedral, there were only homeless people there - you can see that there are many of them on the streets of the capital. Unlike us, they apparently have nowhere to go.

As I drove past the Sophia Cathedral and the heavily guarded headquarters of the Ukrainian security service, I wondered whether a car with Polish registration numbers would arouse suspicion. Dressed in a white habit, I had already prepared all the documents, and in my head I was explaining who I was and what I was doing here. But at the checkpoint, the very heavily armed Ukrainian soldiers did not even want me to stop, unlike the cars in front of me. Apparently as Poles we are not treated as a threat.

Yesterday, just after I sent my letter to you, I met Ira and Nina, who had taken refuge in our monastery. The girls had just returned from the metro station. Imagine that they went there with two full and heavy bags of books!!! A bit of a soul on their shoulders because, after all, they were not allowed to leave. However, they decided that people spending hours in the basement of the Lukianivska metro station needed not only bread, but also a good word. They said that the books were immediately sold out. They also recounted that at the station, carriages with open doors were set up on both tracks so that people could sit and lie not only on the platform, but also inside the trains. Ira and Nina have been involved for years with the St Thomas Institute run by the Dominicans in Kiev. It is clear that their Dominican formation and love for the word did not go to waste, since they risked leaving the safety of the monastery to bring books to the people.

Father Jakub Nesterowicz celebrated the evening Mass yesterday at Christ the King Parish in Khmelnytsky, where our house is located. Before the very end, sirens began to sound and people rose from their seats. The pastor quickly finished reading the parish announcements, Jacob gave the blessing and everyone quickly went down to the basement. Sure enough, the words of the distribution: "Go in the PEACE of Christ", resonate in a unique way at such moments.

Today I spoke with Nikita, a candidate for the Order from Kharkiv. We know that he is under heavy attack from the enemy. Nikita has stayed with his parents, who do not want to leave the city for the time being. They live near a metro station, so they often go there looking for hiding when there are alarms. He said most of the neighbours in his block are there. They have not left. It seems to be different in Kiev.

At the moment Br. Igor Selishchev, who comes from Ukraine and is a deacon. He has just finished his formation in Krakow and, seeing what is happening, he asked the Provincial to allow him to go to his homeland and serve the needy there. His heart was breaking sitting in quiet Krakow. I hope he will reach his destination safely.

In Fastów a little nervous. Everyone is afraid of fights in the vicinity of the town. There is a risk that Russian tanks may be coming from Byszewo. In the St. Martin's House, people are massively making dumplings, baking bread, preparing food for the needy and the defenders of the city.

Last night, on my Facebook profile, I shared the news that one of the world's largest and most powerful AN-225 "Mriya" aircraft was burned as a result of a raid by Russian troops on the airfield of the Antonov plant in Hostomel near Kiev. Its name means "dream". In fact, the arrival of "Mriya" at any airport was a great event and a dream of aviation enthusiasts. You may remember that it was this "Mrija" that delivered masks and other medical equipment to Poland at the beginning of the pandemic. I myself saw it up close once at an air show in Berlin. It turns out that even the great "Mriya", the great "Dream" and pride of Ukrainian aviation can be destroyed by someone. The sad truth of our life! This war has

already buried not one mriya and not one dream of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians. But I believe, and this is how I look at my Order and what we as Dominicans are doing in Ukraine, that the new reality will bring even greater and more beautiful mriyas. Dear ones, remember that when someone or something dares to brazenly destroy your "mriyas", your dreams, it does not mean that the end has come. This is what the Ukrainians are teaching us all today, as they dream of their free, peaceful and prosperous homeland. They are fighting for these dreams, ready to pay a lot. I see it in the eyes of 'our boys and girls' defending Kiev.

I cordially greet you, asking for your prayers!

Jaroslaw Krawiec OP, Kiev, 28 February 2022, 17:00

01.03.2022

Dear sisters and dear brothers,

March 1 is the first day of spring in Ukraine. I read on one of the local internet sites that "it is a day for which people always wait with longing." The Ukrainian first day of spring started in Kyiv with a snow storm. In the morning everything was white on the streets. But most of us did not look for the first snowdrops or other signs of nature waking to life; above all we looked for the disturbing signs of war: another bombardment, sirens, news of what's happening on the streets, and how the world is reacting to the events.

Last night Misha Romaniv called from Fastiv. I was very worried about them because the firefights started on the streets of the city after 8pm. The Ukrainian army shot down a Russian airplane, which crashed somewhere nearby. One could see from a distance burning columns of military vehicles. It all started to feel intense, and almost immediately, close to 80 people from the neighborhood came to us looking for shelter. Some of them with their dogs, cats, and other animals. There was never a lack of animals around the House of Saint Martin, starting with horses and donkeys and ending with parrots and some colorful birds. Father Pawel keeps a dog in the priory, and Father Jan has great sympathy for cats. The brothers understand well that people don't want to leave their animals behind, especially since nobody knows what is going to happen and when they will come back home. Someone arrived on a motorbike; specially designed bags for the transportation of cats were attached to a brand new Honda. The volunteers from Poland brought with them in their minivan some food and, the most needed items among them, a couple bags of dog food. Father Misha was delighted.

Someone else stopped in a very elegant car and took out a more than 10 kg sturgeon which must have cost a fortune, and he donated it to the House of Saint Martin. He was on his way to his family or friends but decided that the food will be more useful for us. At present, all the exits from Fastiv are guarded by soldiers. Everybody is afraid of the continuous escalation of events and the streetfights. Even more so now that the Chechens apparently showed up in the city.

Luckily, Brother Igor Selishchev whom I mentioned yesterday safely arrived in Fastiv by train

through Przemysl and Lviv. His travel was peaceful, and the train arrived on time. Igor is from Donetsk. He has just finished his religious formation and studies in Krakow. Now he has joined us, the Brothers of the Vicariate of Ukraine.

The Master of the Order, Father Gerard Timoner III, wrote to us yesterday. He tried in vain to call me and Father Peter Balog but somehow couldn't succeed. The brothers and sisters from the whole world are now united with Ukraine. It is very important to all of us. And not just the Dominicans worry about us.

It is good that the pandemic taught us how to work online. At noon we had a Zoom meeting of the priests serving the diocese of Kyiv-Zhytomyr and our Bishop Vitalij. He remains here in Kyiv. The priests are a little nervous, but most of them are still in good spirits. Even the oblates from Chernivtsi, who are almost completely cut off from the world. More often than not they are sitting with their parishioners in the basement of the church.

I would like today to write a little bit about these unusual women: the religious sisters. As Father Misha just told me, he was looking today for some way to bring an oven for baking bread from the east side of Kyiv. (This is the most dangerous region of the city, and one has to cross the bridge over the Dnieper.) There were no volunteers. He almost lost any hope of doing it when Sister Anastasia from Slovakia who serves at the Caritas Center said that she is getting in her minivan and will bring the oven. I hope she will get to Fastiv safely. I know I would not have the courage to do that.

The sisters from the Dominican congregation in Zolochiv in western Ukraine were feeding war refugees on the Polish-Ukrainian border crossing in Rava-Ruska. The first moments of evacuations, lines 25 km long, endless human drama, tears, uncertainty, separated families... These brave women in white habits stayed with those people. Sister Matthew told me that today on the way to the border one could see a lot of abandoned cars, travel bags, and personal items. In Chortkiv the Dominican sisters are sharing their basement, which is normally a classroom, with their neighbors. The city has frequent air-raid alarms, but no shots have been fired yet.

Last night I wrote in the letter to my Provincial: "One more thing... It moved me very deeply personally. Please pray for Nikita, our postulant who is in Kharkiv, and Kirill, who is now in our priory with one of the families from the parish. He is considering joining the Order but will probably have to wait. Even today he told me that maybe he could wait as a Lay Dominican. It is some strange sign that the two youngest Dominican "infants" are in the city under bombardment in eastern Ukraine. Sign, witness..." At night Kharkiv was heavily bombed. The shooting keeps going anyways. This afternoon I talked to Kirill — the rocket fell close to the priory. He is holding up well; I didn't feel in his voice any fear or doubt. Amazing. Let us pray for them.

A moment ago I heard a number of strong explosions in our neighborhood. It was the first time they were that loud. A moment later we saw pictures on the internet showing that it was a rocket attack on the TV tower located about a mile away from our priory. They missed.

We are receiving a lot of emails and phone calls with the offer of help. My heart is welling with hope, and I'm authentically moved by your readiness to help. We are not capable however, especially in Kyiv or in Fastiv, to coordinate material help, facilitate refugee transfer to Poland, or organize transport of things. Please act in your own locations, wherever you live. If we need anything and we know it would be possible to achieve, we will let you know, and we will ask you.

Please connect to our Dominican priories in Poland — I know that my brothers and sisters are up to the task. You can write to Marzena from the group Charytatywni-Freta in Warsaw (charytatywni.freta@gmail.com) who is coordinating help for us. She will know what to do and together with her coworkers will make sure that the gifts can eventually find their way to us. You can always support us financially. We are gathering means that we intend to use now and also in the future. I know for sure that they will be very needed. At the end of this letter, I am attaching information about our bank.

Here "on the front lines" we are not able to deal with this ocean of good initiative from the whole world, and we have to stay focused on those who are immediately next to us.

I want to send you my warmest greetings.

Jarosław Krawiec OP,
Kyiv, March 1, 2022, 6pm

02.03.2022

Dear sisters and dear brothers,

Another day of war. The seventh day not of creation but destruction. Increasing brutality, relentless and terrible. At the same time I am deeply convinced that when God looks at these good, helping, selfless people, at the vastness of love, he can see that what he made was very good (Gen 1:31). Today is Ash Wednesday and Lent begins. Father Peter, our Bible scholar, burned a small bonfire on the terrace, so we have new ashes.

Last night we were scared by the rocket attack on the TV tower located close to us. I already mentioned that. It is in our neighborhood. I saw a picture of the killed passersby. They were walking on the sidewalk that I use frequently. Perhaps in that very place I was waiting in my car on Thursday in the line for fuel. This location is the border of Babi Yar, the place of a horrible genocide of the inhabitants of Kyiv, mostly Jewish, murdered by the Nazis in 1941. The president of Ukraine said that history is starting to repeat itself.

The people living with us in the priory are starting to actively participate in the volunteer activities of the city. Father Thomas drove a couple of them to distant locations in Kyiv. It takes a lot of courage. One must drive through multiple checkpoints, show documents, open the trunk. On his way back with one of the ladies yesterday, they drove past Babi Yar. That was exactly where, minutes earlier, rockets hit the ground. Today he refueled the tank on the way.

This morning Father Misha Romaniv called from Fastiv. He was very happy because the bus that left yesterday with over fifty people, mostly children and their mothers, successfully reached Poland. "They are sitting on the Polish side and drinking coffee," he said. May news like this come as much as possible.

Sister Anastasia reached Fastiv safely yesterday, while carrying a bread oven from the east side of Kyiv. Nobody wanted to go, but her trip took her only an hour and a half. It's a record in this situation. Even in normal times it would be a great feat because, due to the heavy traffic, the trip used to take much longer. This morning she drove back carrying fresh bread to Kyiv.

We were given another bread oven in Fastiv from our Italian friend Luccio. His pizzeria in Vinnytsia cannot function now, so without hesitation he told us to take all of the equipment. May it serve well. Thanks to it, we can make 300 loaves of bread daily for the territorial guards. Other friends from Vinnytsia delivered two tons of flour.

Today I would like to write a little about our two bishops. I mentioned in my previous letters Bishop Vitalij from Kyiv who stays in the city. The other bishop from Kyiv, Alexander, went to Zhytomyr to be present in the western part of the diocese, populated by many Catholics. It was a wise decision. Today we talked on the phone. Zhytomyr was under heavy bombardment, and many people found shelter in the basements of the churches. I saw some moving photos that Bishop Alexander posted on his Facebook: people saying the rosary in a couple-hundred-year-old basement of the church. It looks like the catacombs.

I managed to have a conversation with Bishop Paul of Kharkiv. The situation there is very difficult and dangerous. We saw in the news last night that the central square of the city was bombed. Not far from that square is where the cathedral and Catholic curia are located. Luckily the blast of the explosion only damaged a couple of windows and some stained glass. It also damaged part of the roof of the curia where the bishop lives. Bishop Paul himself was just returning from our priory when that happened. Father Irenaeus had evacuated some parishioners earlier from there to Zakarpattia. A number of people asked, however, to stay behind with us. By the advice of the bishop who helped them to find transportation, they have just left. Brave Kirill has left too. It is a wise decision in this situation!

Yesterday a rocket hit a school building located a couple hundred meters from the priory. The bishop called to tell us that he locked our house and asked who owns the white cat. He let it out — we hope that the poor animal will somehow manage, because no one knows when we are returning home. In our situation it's a little awkward to ask somebody: are you staying or leaving? Bishop Paul himself told us at some point that he's not going anywhere. He will stay in his diocese. He believes deeply in the victory of the Truth and the Immaculate! He is a very experienced man. Pope Francis has nominated as bishop this priest who had previously traveled to the front lines in Donbas and served as a military chaplain. Good and brave shepherds!

Dear friends, I would like to end today with the words of Saint Paul, "Where sin increased,

grace overflowed all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through justification for eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom 5, 20-21).

Today I’m sending this letter earlier because I’m going to the nearby hospital. Maybe they need a priest. Let’s see if they let me in.

With warmest greetings, pray for us and Ukraine.

Jarosław Krawiec OP,
Kyiv, March 2, 2022, 1:30pm

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PL 52 1600 1374 1849 2174 0000 0024 (EUR)

SWIFT code (BIC code): PPABPLPK

With the note: "War in Ukraine"

03 03 2022

Dear sisters and dear brothers,

Yesterday we brothers of Ukraine received a link to some short video clips prepared by the ministry of vocations of the Polish Dominican Province. You can see them here: <https://www.youtube.com/c/dominikaniepowolania>. “You cannot even imagine how much you live in the hearts of every one of us, and particularly in my own,” Brother Mykyta Janusz, a Dominican novice from Ukraine, told us in Ukrainian. We would like to thank you, our brothers and sisters, not only from Poland but also from Rome, Bologna, Australia, USA, and Taiwan, for these important words of support. Misha Romaniv asked me to tell you that yesterday evening he was very depressed by this whole situation. Intense fighting for the towns located in the vicinity of Fastiv was taking place. The targets of the attacks, among others, were Makariv and Borodyanka — I would pass by those towns frequently when I went with him and volunteers from Fastiv on the way to Warsaw. We would almost always stop in Borodyanka at the gas station OKKO to have our morning coffee and a hot dog. Now the city is in ruins — it’s heartbreaking to look at pictures of familiar places. And it was then in this psychologically difficult moment that the medicine for the soul was the words of the brothers. “They lifted my spirit, dispelled the sadness and doubt,” said Misha. Some people from Makariv protected their lives by escaping to Fastiv.

Father Wojciech Giertych, the Theologian of the Papal Household, a citizen of the Vatican

and above all our great friend, very much involved in the mission of the Order in Ukraine for over 30 years, said: "Now we need to think not about the present but about the future. We have to be preparing places for people that will offer them formation for internal freedom. Not only the freedom 'from' but the freedom 'to' as Father Pinckaers told us." He is right! Anyway, he taught us the same thing during our theological formation in Krakow. We must not stop at "today," but we need to look to the future. This is the task that is facing those of you in Poland who received under your roofs the war refugees from Ukraine. Think already about your future together with them! Do not wait for the end of the war.

We would like to thank our sisters and brothers from many countries around the world for your words, your prayers, and your help. We are not always capable of responding, but please be assured that you are in our hearts. Both we and Ukraine need you. Throughout the night in Kyiv there were some explosions caused by the rocket attack on the city. One rocket hit in the vicinity of the railway station; the other apparently fell not far from our priory. The mayor of Kyiv told us in his report to the people that nobody died. It is a miracle! The only significant damage was inflicted on the heating main, which is now being rebuilt by the city services. This is very important because it is still pretty cold; in the morning we had a small snow shower and the temperature at noon was only 1 °C. Unfortunately it doesn't look like it's going to get warmer in the coming days. In our priory, everything is working properly so far.

Yesterday in the afternoon, I went to the hospital to offer my service. The first of the hospitals located in our neighborhood was closed. It was evacuated somewhere. The second one, a large regional hospital, is open and gathers many people with injuries from the war. I know this place because I was there last year with my broken leg. This time, when I was approaching the emergency room in my white habit, I was spotted by two police men. They were carrying weapons and confronted me immediately. I showed them my documents and the backpack with all the "priestly paraphernalia". The two gentlemen inquired in detail about the purpose of my visit. At the end I left my telephone number and the information that I am a Catholic priest and can be here at any moment if anyone requires my ministry. So far I haven't heard back from them. It seems to me that in Ukraine and especially in Kyiv, the presence of a priest among the sick is not very popular; although, in some hospitals they have chapels, obviously Orthodox. The defense of the city fulfills its duty with great precision. They are cautious, and they really watch for the safety of the people and buildings under their care.

In the morning I got news from Nikita, the candidate to the Order who lives in Kharkiv: "The whole night, 12 hours, we spent in the subway station. The covers were closed. [Covers are the huge steel gates protecting stations, probably left over from the Cold War.] We didn't get home until 6 in the morning. We rested a little. This night was very difficult for my parents. I'm starting to be a little sorry that I took them to the underground." Maybe there is no need to be sorry since the rocket hit, among others, the neighboring apartment building. The place where he lives with his parents is just a typical residential area. There is no strategically important object within the vicinity. War crimes like this are now becoming frequent.

Another day brings new destruction, but also growing exhaustion among people. Even this

morning, one of the older ladies who lives with us in the priory suddenly didn't feel well. We got scared that she might be having a stroke. Luckily we have a doctor among us, and she could help the older woman. The chances of calling an ambulance right now are zero. We were advised on the phone to possibly bring her to the closest medical point, but we decided that they would not help us much. It is so good that we have a "guardian angel" — a young doctor who knows what to do.

Not all the seniors however have such a comfortable situation in our cities and villages torn by war. Particularly difficult is the situation of the sick and people with limited mobility. Just going to the shelter or the basement prove to be impossible tasks for them, and shopping is similar, not to mention with their general psychological and physical conditions. Here volunteers are showing their value. Many people in Kyiv got involved in this kind of service, and the whole network is gradually becoming more efficient. Many fathers from our community, as well as lay people seeking shelter in the priory, got involved in this kind of work. Yesterday Father Alexander purchased 200 loaves of bread in the bakery, and today through the network of city volunteers, they were distributed to the people in need.

Let me finish with the words of Psalm 44 from today's Office of Readings. This is a message for today from Olga, a student of our Institute of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Kyiv and a Lay Dominican. She lives in a distant neighborhood of Kyiv, unfortunately too far for her to come to Mass in our chapel. Previously, she used to attend Mass daily.

*Not in my bow do I trust,
nor does my sword bring me victory.
You have brought us victory over our enemies,
shamed those who hate us.
In God we have boasted all the day long;
your name we will praise forever.*

The reaction of the world to what is happening can truly be described as the enormous "shaming of those who hate us." But even more shaming is the voice of the war orphans and those who lost their lives. May they rest in eternal peace.

With warmest greetings and the request for prayer!

Jarosław Krawiec OP,
Kyiv, March 3, 2022, 4pm

04 03 2022

Dear sisters and dear brothers,

As the night was relatively calm in Kyiv, so since the early morning, the city is filled with the howl of sirens and the sounds of explosions. Sometimes close, sometimes far away. Despite being somewhat used to it at this point, these sounds are still very unpleasant, especially since we can see what the Russian troops are doing in many Ukrainian cities. We are still

capable of functioning relatively normally in this abnormal situation, but many people at this moment are sitting in shelters and basements. Food is starting to run out, and it's getting colder. I heard from my friends that they are starting to get phone calls from people who just want to say goodbye or say something important, just in case...

The situation in Fastiv is also becoming dangerous. The brothers were warned that the Russian army's route to Kyiv might go through their city, since in other sectors of the front they were stopped and destroyed. May it never happen! Fortunately Father Misha managed to organize a couple transports and evacuate almost 200 people. Maybe even more than that. Some of them are already safely in Poland. A large number of people however still stayed in Fastiv, not to mention our fathers and Dominican sisters. We are needed there especially now, so we could not imagine simply packing our bags and leaving.

Apart from providing a roof over people's heads in Kyiv and in Fastiv, we are trying to find food and share it with those who need it. We are very grateful for the money that you keep sending. It allows us to do the shopping. Just minutes ago, I came back from the bakery with one of the boys who is staying in the priory. We managed again to buy 250 loaves of fresh bread. Driving with such cargo is a real pleasure. During the war, bread — normal, simple bread without any extra ingredients — smells so wonderful! Some of it will remain with us, but most of it will find its way through the volunteers to the needy inhabitants of Kyiv. The House of Saint Martin also bakes a couple hundred loaves of bread daily. The need is enormous. Many people in the villages around Fastiv are starting to run out of food. A particularly difficult situation is the psychiatric hospital in Hlevakha, a small town on the way to Kyiv. They have close to 300 patients. It's not easy to get there, but the boys from Fastiv will look for ways to supply them with food. Especially since a couple transports of food have recently arrived in Fastiv, so there is plenty to share. Misha told me that he's also looking for a way to bring a mother and child from a different village. After the bombings she couldn't cope with the stress; she's helpless, and she doesn't know where to go or what to do. We need to reach her somehow.

Nikita and his parents managed to leave Kharkiv this morning. I don't know how far they got because there was not much fuel in their car. I hope they were able to find a working gas station. The important thing is that they left Kharkiv, which is now being brutally destroyed. I'm sure they will manage. Our house in Khmelnytskyi became a shelter for a group of people connected to the Dominicans. It is good that we have a place to host them. And I know that Brothers Jakub and Wlodzimierz will take very good care of them.

Yesterday was the birthday of Father Tomek Samulnik, and of one of the diocesan priests who lives in our priory in Kyiv. The whole community sat down together in the evening and celebrated a little. Tomek was joking that his 41st birthday is exceptionally loud. Luckily the world outside was quiet.

This letter will be a little shorter because I have to take the car and deliver a couple things to the center for volunteers. Dear friends, since the situation is becoming more difficult, I decided to write to you less frequently. Every two or three days. A lot of pressing problems appear every day, and it's hard to respond to all of them. Please stay calm; my silence will not immediately mean that something bad has happened. We simply have to use our time

and strength wisely so that we can serve people in need here.

Today is a Friday of Lent. Many of us already took part or will take part in the celebration of the stations of the cross. I ask you for prayer for those who now in Ukraine are touching the cross. In a very real way. For those who, like Mary, weep for their children, parents, brothers, and friends. Very often there is not much we can do; we experience emptiness and helplessness, but what we always can do is to pray and stand together with them at the cross, looking at the One who gave his life for us. In Ukraine, this coming Sunday is the beginning of the Year of the Holy Cross. When the Roman Catholic bishops decided that this year will be the time of contemplation of the mystery of the cross, nobody would have suspected that it would also be a time of war. How prophetic was their decision.

“O Cross of Christ be praised. For eternal times be blessed. From You flows strength and courage. In You is our victory.”

With greetings and the request for prayer,

Jarosław Krawiec OP,
Kyiv, March 4, 2022, 4:30pm

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SWIFT code (BIC code): PPABPLPK
With the note: "War in Ukraine"

06 03 2022

Dear sisters and dear brothers,

On this first Sunday of Lent, the Year of the Holy Cross begins in Ukraine, as announced by the Roman Catholic Bishops. In reality it began on Thursday February 24 at 4am, when the first Russian rockets hit Ukraine. “Now, like never before,” write our shepherds, “we understand Christ on his way of the cross.”

On Saturday, most of us were involved with shopping and helping people who are suffering as a result of the war. It takes a lot of time and strength. Father Alexander and a bunch of volunteers took a van that belongs to Caritas and were evacuating people from Irpin. This

city, located almost 20km northwest of Kyiv, was bombed and destroyed by the Russians. Over the last couple years, the city has been growing dynamically, and like Kyiv, attracted many young people and families. Today, a large number of the inhabitants of Irpin are without a roof over their heads. When the fighting subsided in that area, the city authorities and volunteers rushed to help these people.

In the evening one of the volunteers from the priory joined me, and we went to the train station in Kyiv. Inside, enormous crowds; and the rail station is huge. In most areas, the lights are off for security reasons. The station is filled with noise and semi-darkness. People's conversations mix with announcements flowing from the loudspeakers about the arrivals and departures of trains. The travelers must listen very carefully, because these announcements are the only way to learn anything. The crowds at the station consist mostly of families and mothers with children. Some of these children are so tiny that they should be sleeping in their beds at this time of the day. I passed by one dad who very calmly but strongly told his little children, "Hold very tight to your mom." Getting lost in this situation is a tragedy. Many children sit around with phones in their hands. Video games. Children at play. There is some comfort in it, some chance to distract them even for a moment from the reality around them. Not far from the train station, there is Okhmatdyt, the children's hospital famous in all of Ukraine. It stays open all the time, although it has been bombed already. The railway stations also have their share of elderly; I saw some people in wheelchairs. Somebody had a dog on a leash. My brother Mariusz, who is a religious, too — a Paulist — serves and lives in Lviv. He told me in the morning that the railway station in Lviv is surrounded by many dogs. The refugees who couldn't take them any further left them with the hope that they would find new owners.

When we returned to the priory, we had to go straight back to the car again. Our cook, who is living with us during the war, fell on the steps. We were afraid that she might have broken her hand. We called the ambulance, but ambulances don't go to cases like this during the war. We were given the addresses of the two closest hospitals. It was already after 8pm, which means curfew, which means we cannot leave our homes. What could we do? I put on my white Dominican habit and went to the closest intersection guarded by the territorial defense. Our boys, seeing me, immediately took a defensive posture with weapons. I spread out my hands so they could see that I meant no harm. We talked for a while and agreed that someone has to take a car and drive to the hospital because the lady should not stay in pain overnight. They advised me, however, not to drive too fast and to slow down even more at every checkpoint. The streets were completely empty, so we got to the emergency room relatively quickly. Our cook did not break her hand after all, only strained it. The surgeons did their job, and we could come back. The same route, the same checkpoints and questions. Despite the fact that most lights are off in the evening, patients are still in the hospital. Not all of them are victims of war. The emergency room crew reminded me that people still get sick with normal diseases. It made me think that in the present situation, that's one of the worst things that could happen to someone. And what are people cut off from the world by fighting supposed to do? I try not to think about it.

I talked for a little bit with the police officers guarding the hospital. In Kyiv, the Dominican habit usually causes curiosity and surprise; in war time, frequently suspicion. A short explanation usually suffices; the Eastern Churches also have monks and monasteries, so we

are usually treated with a certain sympathy. At the end of my short conversation, the officers asked for a blessing.

It might take a miracle to talk to Misha in Fastiv today. So far, I couldn't get a hold of him, so I will try to write about Fastiv in the next letter. I'm not surprised; it's Sunday and war, but it's also his birthday. I do hope for a miracle.

Last night the train with supplies from Khmelnytskyi arrived to us. We are very grateful to our friends from the parish of Christ the King, where our Dominican brothers serve; and to its pastor Father Nicholas, for sharing with us what they received themselves. It's almost a ton of food. Father Alexander took most of it in the morning to the priory of the Capuchins. (It's across town on the east side of the Dnieper.) That way, the food will find its way to the people who need it the most. Some of it stayed with us however, and this morning we had delicious steamed sausages from Nowy Sacz for breakfast. Most of the supplies brought by that train are things from Poland. We are grateful to all the hearts and all the hands from my country who purchased and shipped the "treasures." We'll keep the kabanos for a rainy day. The vocational ministry of the Polish Dominican Province recently added a couple of video greetings for Ukraine and for us. We are very grateful to the Dominican nuns from Radonie, Swieta Anna, and Grodek, sisters from the Congregation of the sisters of Saint Dominic, and brothers from Ireland and Germany. In Jerusalem the brothers prayed for us at the tomb of the Lord. The lay Dominicans, sisters and brothers from many fraternities in Poland, surround us with their prayer and strengthen us with their fasting and almsgiving. Here is what Zosia wrote to us: "I'm a member of the Family of the Mother of Sorrows, which in 1999 was received by the provincial and his council into the Dominican Family. Among the members of this community are people who have long-term diseases, some who are handicapped physically, and some who are completely healthy. Since the war started in Ukraine, we've been praying every day for you and for peace. Today in a particular way, we would like to embrace the Dominican sisters and you Dominican brothers (over there in Ukraine), offering, besides our prayer, everything we experience today — pain, difficulty, and suffering (some of us suffer very much) — in your intention, placing you into the offering of Christ." What a great solidarity in suffering with those who were wounded physically, psychologically, or spiritually. Thank you!

This afternoon the sky over the priory in Kyiv is full of birds. I don't know if it's a sign of the coming spring. I'll ask Father Peter, who is an expert on the New Testament, but also on nature. The birds nervously jump, make noise, and burst into flight every time we hear distant explosions. Father Thomas Slowinski in Lviv wrote today on his Facebook profile, following the words of Jesus, "Do not be afraid: You are more important than many sparrows."

With greetings and request for prayer,

Jarosław Krawiec OP,
Kyiv, March 6, 2022, 4:15pm

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