

News from the vicar provincial of Ukraine, Jarosław Krawiec OP

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](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1mKjKjKjKjKjKjKjKjKjKj) 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!

Jaroslav 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 Khmel'nitsky, 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