

# MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

## DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

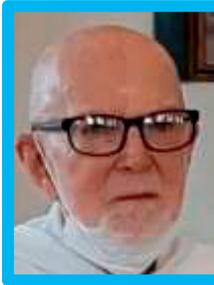
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## *Mitigating Madness*



Dear Mission Friends:

We are compiling and sending this April newsletter well before the first of the month due to the immediate and urgent needs of those trapped in Ukraine, both Ukrainians and Russians, as well as those who have been able to escape to Poland which, at this writing, number over 600,000. Our Dominican Mission Foundation office has been designated the central point for collecting Ukraine donations sent to all ministries within our Western Dominican Province. At the onset of the invasion, we sent \$200,000 and will continue to send weekly checks directly to the Polish Dominican Province, which is collecting food, medical supplies, clothes, bedding, etc. and distributing them to refugees in their country as well as to those still in Ukraine wherever possible.

Our friars in the Polish Dominican Province have a close relationship with the Dominicans in Ukraine, and in turn, we Dominicans in the west have a close relationship with our Polish brethren, many of whom studied at our school in Berkeley, some remaining here to faithfully serve in our ministries.



*Ukraine's  
capitol city,  
Kyiv,  
late February.*

And we are receiving daily reports from Dominicans in Ukraine via our Polish brothers. So we are feeling a special connection to the events unfolding in Europe.

As I am wont to do, I will give you a history of Dominican presence in the area, promising to keep it brief: The Dominicans first arrived in Kyiv, Ukraine, in the early 1200s, joining the Dominican Province of Rus which existed until the end of World War II. At that time, some Dominicans and lay leaders were expelled from the Soviet Union but many others were executed, sometimes entire communities at once. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine gained its independence, declared itself a neutral state, and formed a limited military partnership with Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States while also establishing a partnership with NATO.

In 2013, Ukraine's President Yanukovych suspended the Ukraine-EU Agreement and sought closer economic ties with Russia. Demonstrations led to a "Revolution of Dignity" which ended in overthrowing the government.

The new leadership eventually restored the country's relationship with the EU, but since 2014, when vengeful Russia annexed Crimea and launched aggression in the eastern part of Ukraine, the country has never stopped having to defend their sovereignty in an ongoing war.

Our Order had officially returned to Ukraine in 1993, and then also to Russia, and the General Vicariate of St. Michael the Archangel was formed, dedicated to bringing religious life back to the region. Today the Dominican Family in Ukraine comprises twenty-five friars in six communities and eighteen sisters in five communities. They have been trying to rebuild churches that were destroyed, a difficult task in areas where local officials can be unfriendly to our Order. Even so, in addition to rebuilding several churches and chapels which they administer, they have established the Thomas Aquinas Institute of Catholic Theology in Kyiv, where Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, and agnostics are invited to study; their own publishing house, *Kairos*, which oversees their website "The Friar" as well as book acquisitions;

*May the Queen of Peace preserve the world from the madness of war.*



*Ukrainian friars, left, and sisters, right, offering images of hope. Center, the Pokrova, signifying Mary's intercession and protection as she holds a blanket of fabric over the people; it's credited with many miracles during wartime. Below, children from the orphanage, spreading much-needed joy.*

*...honestly, my heart is breaking. The tragic events unfolding in Ukraine are giving us all pause. We cry out to God, begging for peace and an end to human suffering. ~Fr. Christopher Fadok, O.P.*

and the St. Martin de Porres Center in Fastiv, an orphanage for children without parents, street children, sick or disabled children, children from disadvantaged families, and, since the start of hostilities in Eastern Ukraine, over 220 children from the combat zone whose lives have been traumatized by war, offering them spiritual and psychological support and the chance to recover in a safe environment.

According to Fr. Petro S. Balog, O.P., Associate Director of the Thomas Aquinas Institute in Kyiv, "As we strive to rebuild the Dominican communities that once existed on these lands, with their rich spiritual and historical legacy, we never lose sight of our essential mission: to serve the People of God as preachers, chaplains, and teachers. We want to be, once again, an integral part of the Ukrainian society we serve and to nourish the cultural and scholarly life of our region. As Dominicans, we are eager to engage in honest dialog with all people of good will, following the example of St. Dominic and guided by God's compassionate hand. [In the orphanage] we have combined our mission with the spirituality of St. Martin de Porres [who] tried in word, counsel, and work...to fulfill Christ's command: 'Be merciful as your Father is merciful,' regardless of social status, color, political views, and creed."

Today, all those painstakingly-rebuilt structures are being repurposed to protect and hide and feed hundreds who have nowhere else to go, including many elderly who are alone or sick. The buildings are, however, still "[serving] the people of God" as the friars and sisters follow the examples of St. Dominic and St. Martin de Porres, "guided by God's compassionate hand...[and being] merciful..." We pray that the buildings remain standing against the forces of evil.

God's compassionate hand is sending support from all over the world, but immediate and direct aid is coming especially from Poland. Countless Poles are driving to the border, picking up strangers, and bringing them to their homes. Polish hospitals are treating injured Ukrainians gratis. Our Dominican brothers in Poland are also doing everything they can to help. Besides acquiring and distributing food, medical supplies, clothes, bedding, etc. to refugees in their country and organizing shipments of supplies into Ukraine, they are also housing refugees in their own priories. One specific example of selfless support comes from a Ukrainian Dominican deacon studying in Poland—he could no longer remain in peaceful Poland knowing the suffering of his people and begged his superior to be able to return to Ukraine and help minister there.

He was granted permission and all are praying for his safety, keeping in mind that, as articulated by our Western Dominican Provincial, Fr. Christopher Fadok, O.P., "the power of God transcends all borders, all governments, all political parties, all human institutions and earthly inventions. In desperate and frightening times, we must remember that His love and mercy endures forever, and that our faith in Him is never in vain!"

As you, our Mission Friends, know well, we support not only our regular mission areas but also special disaster or emergency needs of other Dominican-served areas outside the U.S., which in the past have included Nigeria, Pakistan, and Haiti. **Today, you can help us ease some of the suffering caused by the Ukrainian invasion by offering your own prayers and, if possible, joining us in sending relief funds.**

In Christ's peace,  
Fr. Martin de Porres Walsh, O.P.



## Excerpts from the daily messages of Fr. Jaroslaw Krawiec, O.P. in Kyiv

### **February 26, 2022, 12:00 pm**

We can hear now occasional distant explosions. This morning is very sunny, although walks are not advisable because of the possibility of finding yourself under fire. I did manage to find a market still open in my neighborhood, despite the fact that almost everything in Kyiv is closed. One can still see people on the streets, many carrying weapons. They check documents and they also check cars. The subway system was turned into a shelter. So far, we still have communication (telephone and internet), water, light, and natural gas. Our priory has two basements, one for women and the other for men. Almost 20 people from our ministries have asked to temporarily stay with us. Our “war community” has substantially increased.

There were street shootouts in Fastiv last night, some of them not far from our priory. For this reason, a number of persons were seeking shelter in the chapel under the church. Fr. Misha Romaniv stays in contact with the local authorities who try to ensure the safety of our neighborhood as much as they can. They know very well that the House of St. Martin is a temporary home for many people, among them children. A group of thirty children left yesterday for Poland. We have received, however, another thirty, the youngest among whom is David, only sixteen days old!

### **February 27, 2022, 3:30 pm**

Yesterday when I wrote to you, I mentioned “normality”, which ended in the morning. Phone service has been cut off. In Fastiv, explosions were heard as Russian troops bombed the air force base between Fastiv and Kiev. The sisters decided to stay in their monastery in Kiev and pray. I hope that in the following days we will be able to reach them to say Mass. In the morning, there were long lines at each ATM, similarly in front of gas stations and some shops. Traffic jams have disappeared from the streets in the city center. Sinister emptiness...Fr.Misha organizes food and whatever is possible for all the people who are in Fastiv. A third group of children from that region is being organized but there is a problem with leaving. There are no military units in Fastiv, so hopefully no one will think of attacking the city. An air raid warning has been announced in Kyiv—people are urged to stay in safe places and it is forbidden to walk on the streets until Monday at 8am. At dawn I peeked through the bars of the gate and saw a couple of empty buses and two ambulances. My heart was pained when I saw parents holding fast by the hand two of their little children who were dragging small suitcases. Many hide at the subway stations where large screens are set up and they play cartoons to help children survive the difficult times, but there are no restrooms.

The whole neighborhood was relatively quiet during the day, but we could hear shootings through the night as well as the sounds of the fight for the airport about 40 km away. Almost everybody came down to the shelter under the church. In Fastiv, the people who are bravely persisting there are not just our friars and lay volunteers from the Center of St. Martin, but also Dominican sisters who normally serve at the parish, teach catechesis, and work with children at St. Martin. Today they do everything that is necessary, which means they serve others with their lives, with courage, and with love. The youngest guest of St. Martin is David, who is eighteen days old. I call him David like the Biblical David who defeated Goliath with a rock from his sling. I am grateful our little David escaped from war with his mom to Fastiv and today during the Eucharist he was baptized.

Dear friends in Poland and around the world, thanks to you who help suffering Ukraine with great commitment. Today many of you break bread with the refugees from Ukraine in your homes, parishes, and centers. Today for many of you, the barriers of languages, of politics, and of religion have vanished. Today many of you heal with love the wounds inflicted by the madness of the tyrants. I would like to thank all of my brothers and sisters wearing white habits, lay Dominicans, my family, friends, and acquaintances, as well as the innumerable people with giving hearts who support us with their help and prayer. I am convinced that this good will crush the enemy’s power.

### **February 28, 2022, 5pm**

At 5:30 in the morning, I was awakened by the sound of a loud firefight in the vicinity of our priory. Sleep is now in short supply for many in Ukraine. One of the friars who is very involved in helping others told me that he has to force himself to eat. At 8 am we could finally go out on the streets of Kyiv after 38 hours of curfew. We immediately went in search of open stores to resupply our food reserve. To my complete surprise, I managed to get a couple loaves of fresh bread, though the line to the cashier was an hour long. All stores are watched by the military because those are potential places where terrorist acts could happen. I am very grateful for your financial support, which means that at this moment we don’t have to worry at least about how to shop for ourselves and for all the people who are finding shelter under our priory roof. In the House of St. Martin, people are making huge numbers of perogies and loaves of bread for the needy and the defenders of the city.

I went to the cathedral to pick up medical kits distributed to priests by the bishop’s curia. Today nobody was at Mass because they were afraid to leave their houses. Two girls who work at the Institute of St. Thomas in Kyiv and who are finding shelter in our priory had just returned from the subway station. Would you believe that they went there with two heavy bags full of books? It was a risky endeavor because nobody was supposed to leave their houses. They decided however that people who are spending long hours underground in the subway station would need not only bread but also good books. They told me also that the railcars had open doors so that people could sit and lie down, not only at the platform but also inside the trains. The Ukrainians dream about their free, peaceful, and growing homeland and are ready to pay dearly.

**March 1, 2022, 6:00 pm**

Last night Fr. Misha called from Fastiv where firefights started on the streets after 8 pm. The Ukrainian army shot down a Russian airplane, which crashed somewhere nearby. One could see burning columns of military vehicles. It all started to feel intense, and immediately, close to 80 people from the neighborhood came to us looking for shelter, many with their dogs, cats, and other animals. Since we have always had animals here at St. Martin, from horses and donkeys to parrots and other colorful birds, as well as dogs and cats, the brothers know well that people don't want to leave their animals behind. Volunteers from Poland brought in their minivan some food and, the most needed items among them, a couple bags of dog food. Fr. Misha was delighted. Someone else stopped in a very elegant car and took out a 10 kg sturgeon. He was on his way to his family or friends but decided that the food would be more useful for us.

Everybody is afraid of the continuous escalation of events. All the exits from Fastiv are guarded by soldiers, but luckily, the Ukrainian deacon safely arrived in Fastiv by train. 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 and our Bishop Vitalij who remains here in Kyiv. At night Kharkiv was heavily bombed and the shooting keeps going anyway. A moment ago I heard a number of strong explosions in our neighborhood. 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. They missed. The priests are a little nervous, but most of them are still in good spirits. I would like to write about the religious sisters. Fr. Misha was looking today for some way to bring an oven for baking bread to Fastiv from Kyiv, crossing the bridge over the Dnieper both ways. He had almost lost hope when Sr. Anastasia, who serves at the Caritas Center, said that she would drive her minivan and bring the oven. I know I would not have the courage to do that. More brave women in white habits, from the Dominican congregation in Zolochiv in western Ukraine, were feeding 25 km-long lines of war refugees on the Polish-Ukrainian border crossing in Rava-Ruska, staying with them through their tears and fears and probably permanent separations from loved ones. In Chortkiv the Dominican sisters are sharing their basement with their neighbors. My heart is welling up with hope from your offers of help, but we are not able to coordinate material help or facilitate refugee transfer to Poland. We must stay focused on those in our immediate presence. Please connect to our Dominican priories in Poland.

**March 2, 2022, 1:30 pm**

Another day of war, the seventh day not of creation but of destruction and increasing, relentless brutality. Last night we were scared by the rocket attack on the TV tower in our neighborhood. I saw a picture of the passersby, killed while walking on the sidewalk that I use frequently. Some of those living with us in the priory drove courageously to Kyiv yesterday to do some volunteer work, having to stop at multiple checkpoints, show documents, open the trunk. On their way back, they passed the spot where, just minutes earlier, rockets hit the ground.

Sr. Anastasia and the bread oven reached Fastiv safely yesterday. And we were given a pizza oven and other equipment from our Italian friend Luccio whose pizzeria has had to close. And other friends delivered two tons of flour. We can now make hundreds of loaves of bread and pizzas daily for all our tenants and guards. Finally, this morning Fr. Misha called from Fastiv, very happy that the bus that left yesterday with over fifty people, mostly children and their mothers, successfully reached Poland.

Today I would like to write a little about our two bishops. The bishop from Kyiv, Alexander, went to Zhytomyr, which has been under heavy bombardment, 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. I saw some moving photos that he posted on his Facebook: people saying the rosary in a 200 year-old basement of the church. It looks like the catacombs. I also managed to have a conversation with Bishop Paul of Kharkiv where the situation is also very difficult and dangerous. The central square, near where the cathedral and Catholic curia are located, was bombed. The blast damaged a couple of windows, some stained glass, and part of the roof where the bishop lives. Yesterday a rocket hit a school building located near the priory. A number of parishioners asked to stay with us and they are on their way. Bishop Paul himself told us that he's not going anywhere. He believes deeply in the victory of the Truth and the Immaculate!

**March 3, 2022, 4:00 pm**

We would like to thank our brothers and sisters, not only from Poland but also from Rome, Bologna, Australia, USA, and Taiwan, for their important words of support in this series of short video clips prepared by the Polish Dominican Province. We are not always capable of responding, but please be assured that you are in our hearts. Fr. Misha had become very depressed, but watching the clips was medicine for his soul. "They lifted my spirit, dispelled the sadness and doubt," said Misha (<https://www.youtube.com/c/dominikaniepowolania>).

Another day brings new destruction and growing exhaustion. One of the older ladies who lives with us in the priory suddenly felt ill and we thought she might be having a stroke. The chances of getting an ambulance right now are zero, but luckily we have a doctor among us, our "guardian angel," and she was able to help the woman. But not all the seniors however have such a comfortable situation. Many of the sick and the handicapped in particular find it impossible to climb down to the basement or a subway shelter; shopping is out of the question; and depression and anxiety are rampant. Here volunteers, including our friars, sisters, and lay members, are showing their value, having created an efficient network to assist the seniors. Yesterday they distributed 200 loaves of our bread to them. We are very grateful for your prayers and for all the words of support and solidarity.