

## Further news from the Provincial Vicar of Ukraine

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*Dear sisters and dear brothers,*

*Today Kyiv is very sunny, although it's cold, -2 °C. At night the temperature drops to -8 °C. When the heating works, it's not a problem, but many places don't have electricity or gas. For that reason, people are longing this year for the spring to come faster and for the weather to become warmer. Today I saw pictures of people who were evacuated yesterday from Kyiv. They were wading through the ice-cold river Irpin because the bridge had been blown up, and there was no other way. Some of them were carrying children in their arms.*

*Let me start today with writing a little about the Dominican laity. There are a couple fraternities in Ukraine: in Kyiv, Fastiv, Murafa, and Zakarpattia. There is also a fraternity in Lviv, which is in the process of reestablishment and has existed since before the war (the Second World War, obviously).*

*Among the lay people of the Dominican Order, there are old and a few young. Unfortunately, first the pandemic and now the war drastically limit the possibility of having regular meetings, and in some cases they became impossible. The superior of the lay Dominicans in Ukraine, Halina, lives in Fastiv and is very seriously involved in helping the refugees who request evacuation. One of the novices from Lviv has just joined the army. His unit is in the formation process and will be sent very soon to defend Ukraine. I told him that if he ends up in Kyiv, he should try to look us up. A large part of the tertiary Dominicans remain at home, but some who lived in the most dangerous areas were forced to leave.*

*The Institute of Religious Studies of Saint Thomas Aquinas, which has been run by the Dominicans in Kyiv for the past 30 years, did not completely suspend its activities. Yesterday Father Peter gave a lecture on the Synoptic Gospels. The lecture was obviously online. The participants consisted of a couple first year students and one fourth year. This morning Father Peter told me that teaching about the Bible during war has become for him a new experience of discovering the power and meaning of the Word of God. I agree with him completely. As I daily read parts of the Bible proposed by the rhythm of the Church's liturgy, I can hear and see more.*

*The brothers in Lviv, besides their regular ministry, take part in helping the refugees who arrived in great numbers in this largest city in Western Ukraine. Father Wojciech lived for a couple days at the monastery of Benedictine nuns on the outskirts of Lviv. More than a hundred people running from war are sheltered there, among them Benedictine nuns from Zhytomyr. Father Thomas works closely with the city volunteers. The Lviv art museum, located in the city center, became a warehouse of humanitarian resources, and Father Thomas, along with others, organizes it. "Sometimes people ask me," he told me yesterday, "what I am doing here, since I am Polish. I tell them this is my city, too; I am a Dominican." Let me add that Father Thomas' mother is from Lviv. Sometimes people are surprised when they find out who we are, and that we stayed with them during the war. I'm learning, however, that during war I become less and less surprised by things. Thomas was joking that when the food from Poland arrives, he helps the volunteers figure out what the food items actually are. "They cannot understand that 'Szczecin pepper mash' is simply ground fish in cans." For the uninitiated, let me add that this can used to be the number one product for tourists in Communist Poland. I cannot even remember how many of them I ate during my youth while camping in the mountains.*

*The growing problem for the regions afflicted by war is lack of medicines. Although many pharmacies in Kyiv are still open, the most important medicines are not available. People with long-term diseases, with diabetes, and older people with heart conditions suffer very much. The humanitarian deliveries of medical supplies are now worth their weight in gold.*

*As I mentioned before, in Kyiv we are working closely with the local headquarters of the city volunteers, which is located a couple hundred meters from the priory. It is actually located in the building of the*

*theater "Silver Island." Maryna, one of the actresses, is Catholic. After Father Adam Szustak read one of my letters on his online show, she was contacted by her friend who said, "Go to the Dominicans: they have bread." That was exactly the day that we brought a couple hundred loaves of bread to the priory. And that's how our cooperation began. The power of social media!*

*On Tuesday night we were sitting in the priory having dinner with Maryna and her friend, Jurij, who is an actor, too. He told us an amazing story. So he had just returned from the town of Hostomel. I wrote about this city, which is now ruined by bombs and occupied by the Russian army, in my previous letter. Jurij heard from official announcements that a humanitarian corridor was opened to evacuate people, and he went there with his car. He managed to reach the city and pick up a couple people. On the way back, however, he was stopped by the Russian army. It was a miracle they weren't shot at immediately. The soldiers were very clearly surprised by his "arrogance" and started asking him who he was and what he was doing. He answered truthfully that he's an actor and works in the theater, and if not for the war, tonight at 7 he would have the premier of Dostoyevski's White Nights. To check if he was lying, the Russians asked him to act... And Jurij, right there in the middle of the street in Hostomel, with the barrels of Russian guns pointed at him, started playing his role — the Dreamer. He had to stop at the moment when Nastya's part was supposed to come; Nastya is played by Maryna. The soldiers asked him: Where is she? Jurij pointed to the phone and said, "Right here! She's trying to call me for the tenth time." They let him go, together with the people he was saving from hell. I asked him if I could write about him today. He agreed immediately. During the conversation, I said something about the premier that was supposed to happen on March 7. He interrupted me immediately: "Don't say it was supposed to happen! It did happen!" When the war is over and you visit Kyiv, you must go to the theater, Silver Island.*

*As a Dominican priory, we are trying not to lose our normal rhythm of the day, which is measured by the liturgy. So there is morning prayer, for which brothers are sometimes missing, but we try to be forgiving to each other during the time of war. At noon Father Jakub calls whoever is around to invite them to say the rosary and stay for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament afterward. In the evening we celebrate vespers and the Conventual Mass, which is the Eucharist celebrated by the whole community. Almost like normal life in the priory. There is a lot of truth in that. We really try to stay normal.*

*Warm greetings and request for prayers,*

*Jarosław Krawiec OP,  
Kyiv, March 10, 2022, 3:30pm*