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Lanovychi, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2022

**Very Rev. William V. Kaliyadan, M.S.**  
**Provincial Superior**  
**Missionaries of La Salette,**  
**Province Mary, Mother of the Americas**  
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Dear Father William,

I send you heartfelt greetings from Ukraine, where I am spending Easter this year. Once again, I want to express my gratitude for the donation you made on behalf of the American Province to support Ukraine. In this letter I would like to introduce you to the current situation in our houses and parishes in Ukraine and briefly inform about how the Polish Province is aiding the people in need in Ukraine.

**Situation in the houses and parishes in Ukraine**

The District of Eastern Europe, which includes 8 parishes in Ukraine and Belarus, is an integral part of the Polish Province. There are fourteen La Salettes serving there. In Ukraine, ten priests and one brother serve in six parishes, while in Belarus there are two parishes with three priests. Although Belarus, because of its collaboration with Russia, is treated by Ukraine as an aggressor, our religious communities stand together in prayer for end to war and true peace. Our houses and parishes are situated in the western, central, south-eastern and eastern parts of Ukraine.

**Lanovychi**, with a population of ca. 650, is a village in western Ukraine, about 60 km from the Polish border. Besides Lanovychi we also serve in a small parish in Maksimovychi. In both parishes work Fr. Tomasz Krzeminski, M.S. and Fr. Ivan Diakiv, M.S. In Lanovychi there is the only La Salette shrine in this part of Europe.

After the war about 350 people left the village. Those who remained people were mainly elderly and sick people and several mothers with children caring for ailing members of their families. Lanovychi did not suffer directly from warfare, but on the first day of the war panic in the village was caused by a rocket attack on a military base situated 10 km away. In Lanovychi there are also ca. 35 people who fled the war-affected areas. In the whole of the Sambir Raion about 2 000 IDPs have found temporary shelter.

The religious community, in collaboration with the La Salette houses in Poland and Europe, organizes help with food, accommodation and basic personal hygiene products for the refugees and poor inhabitants of the region. Because of the great stress affecting people, the pastoral workers also organize activities for ca. 30 children who have remained in the village. This is a time of rest for the mothers, and an opportunity for the children to get away from a difficult reality. In the religious house the confreres take in refugees for the night and help them organize transport to the Polish border.

**Busk** is a town of ca. 8,000 people in the Lviv Oblast. Fr. Jan Stachura, M.S. and Bro. Tadeusz Luszczynski, M.S. serve in the Roman Catholic community of about 250 members. Fr. Andriy Schastlivtsev, who comes from the Diocese of Kamenets and discerns a vocation to religious life, has been staying at our house for over a year. Apart from Busk, our confreres take pastoral care of the parish in Olesko (ca. 30 parishioners).

In the first days of the war the Russian army was firing rockets at the nearby military bases. Currently, there are no hostilities taking place in the town. Due to its location, Busk has become the main reloading base for humanitarian aid flowing from Polish and European La Salette houses. Humanitarian aid is sorted here and sent to the east.

In addition, the local community has made rooms available for refugees in the house and in the parish buildings. Some of them are staying overnight on their way to Poland, and a few families are staying for a longer period while waiting for the end of war. The confreres from Busk are also organizing help for refugees who have found shelter in the city. They have taken special care of a school that housed 35 children from an orphanage relocated from the east of the country.

**Brailiv** is a village of about 4,500 inhabitants situated in the central part of Ukraine. Fr. Józef Krzyszycha, M.S. and Fr. Mykhailo Trach, M.S. serve in a parish of ca. 300 faithful. The sanctuary of Jesus of Nazareth is one of the most important places of pilgrimage in Ukraine, not only for Catholics, but also for Orthodox Christians.

During the first week of the war, nearby military bases were shelled several times. From outside the house, low-flying rockets can often be seen bombing strategic locations in Ukraine, as well as housing estates in more distant towns. One of the country main civilian airports was also bombed in the area. The rocket fire on the nearby Vinnytsia became the direct cause of the departure of many people from Brailiv.

The La Salettes get involved in the evacuation of the civilian population and have co-organized the transport of children from the parish to Poland. Using donations from our parishes in Europe and organizing collections of clothes and food in Brailiv, they also help the army, refugee centers in the region and the elderly people of neighboring villages.

**Kryvyi Rih**, city with ca. 680,000 people, is situated in the southeastern part of Ukraine. The La Salette parish is the only Roman Catholic community in the city and has about 250 members. It is served by Fr. Jerzy Lis, M.S. and Fr. Ivan Strogush, M.S. and three sisters from the Congregation of Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.

The Russian army is now stationed about 50 km from the city, making it impossible for the priests to visit many of the sick people with the sacramental ministry. It is also impossible to reach two nearby villages to celebrate Mass for the small Catholic communities. There have been several missile attacks on military strategic objectives in the city. Kryvyi Rih already became a place of refuge for many IDPs in 2014 after the Russian army attacked Donbas. To respond to the needs of these people, a plot of land adjacent to the church was purchased in 2016 and the House of Mercy – a place to prepare and serve meals, and the largest aid station in the city – was built in 2018. Before the war, ca. 350 people regularly benefited from such aid.

Currently, La Salettes and sisters dispense 800 loaves of bread twice a week. Additionally, twice a week they prepare hot soup for about 50 people and distribute it to the homeless directly at the nearby bus station. Many of the beneficiaries of the House of Mercy

need basic health care, so the parish recently opened a medical office. One of the sisters, who has the necessary qualifications, is on duty every day, dressing wounds, changing bandages and providing basic medications free of charge. At the medical office, the homeless can also have their blood pressure and sugar levels checked. The religious house is currently hosting refugees from areas of warfare. Evacuation of mothers with children from the territory of the parish to Poland is also being organized.

**Nikopol** is a city located in the southeastern part of the country with a population of about 127,000. The only Roman Catholic parish in the city has ca. 50 people and is served by Fr. Zbigniew Beskur, M.S.

About 7 km from the city there is a nuclear power plant, over which bloody fights took place in the first half of March. After the artillery shelling a dangerous fire broke out in the power plant. Currently, the power plant is under the control of Russian troops, who are holding the workers hostage. On the territory of the power plant, the occupiers have established a temporary base with about 1,000 soldiers and many vehicles, explosives, and ammunition. The Russian army has also blown up a transmission line, cutting off electricity in the towns where the fiercest fighting is taking place. Currently, the occupiers are detonating unexploded ordnance left over from the assault on the power plant, creating a very serious radiological threat. In mid-March, they made several attempts to land at Nikopol through the waters of the Kachov Reservoir. For fear of seizing the city, the waterfront of the reservoir bordering the parish area was mined. Since the beginning of the war there has also been artillery shelling of military positions located in the city.

As in Kryvyi Rih and Zaporizhzhya, in Nikopol, in collaboration with the confreres of the western Ukrainian parishes, the La Salettes are organizing the evacuation of the inhabitants, as well as providing necessary food for the elderly and sick who remain in the city.

**Zaporizhzhya**, located in the eastern part of the country, has a population of ca. 750,000. There are two Roman Catholic communities here. The parish run by our Congregation has 75 members. It is served by Fr. Jerzy Cyrul, M.S. and Fr. Fryderyk Wyrostek, M.S.

Due to its location, it is the place most threatened by warfare. Since the beginning of the war there has been an artillery shelling of strategic military positions in the city. In the first days of March rockets also fell on civilian positions.

Using pastoral facilities, the La Salettes provide accommodation and food for people evacuated from bombed areas and help evacuate women and children from Zaporizhzhya to the western part of the country. During bomb alerts, the local population gathers in the basement of the church. The largest transports of humanitarian aid ever delivered by the La Salette houses and parishes have reached Zaporizhzhya, so the confreres are trying to organize help for the local people.

So far none of our parishes has been directly affected by the war, so our confreres are able to continue their pastoral work, in addition to helping the people in need. Due to the immediate danger in Zaporizhzhya, Nikopol and Kryvyi Rih, liturgy is usually celebrated in the basements of houses, but despite such difficulties, in all our parishes in Ukraine, additional services for peace in the homeland have been introduced, as well as additional ministry of confession.

The conditions of daily life have changed a lot in Ukraine. A curfew has been imposed throughout the country from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. The Ukrainian army has set up roadblocks on many roads and frequently conducts vehicle inspections. In cities, bomb alerts are constantly announced, and a nighttime blackout of cities and villages is in effect. In early April, there were the first shocking reports of war crimes committed by Russian troops in the occupied territories. In towns around Kyiv, such as Irpin, Bucha, Hostomel and Borodianka, Russian soldiers massively tortured and killed defenseless civilians, raped women and children, robbed empty houses and apartments. Humanitarian corridors from the ruined Kharkiv and Mariupol were viciously shelled. Mariupol, which has been under siege for over a month, is a humanitarian

disaster. About 20,000 people may have died there because of the hostilities, with about 100,000 residents still in the city. There are reports that in Mariupol the Russian troops have started burning the corpses of civilians in mobile crematoria to hide the traces of the crime.

The general panic among the population further mobilizes the confreres to devote even more time and attention to the people they meet or who stay in our houses. Many refugees have had to leave behind all their possessions or family members. Increasingly, they are learning about the loss of family members, and as a result, they are experiencing trauma. Although eight La Salettes who are Polish citizens could leave Ukraine, all of them want to stay and serve the people with material help and priestly ministry as long as possible.

### **Aid to the war victims provided by houses and parishes in the Province**

In all the houses of our Province, as well as in the parishes that we run, since the first day of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, common prayers for peace, for the conversion of Russia, for reconciliation between the Ukrainian and Russian peoples, and for the quickest possible end of the war have been ongoing. These prayers are animated by religious communities, as well as by formation and apostolic groups in parishes.

Here are the forms of assistance that our religious communities and parishes provide to Ukraine:

- fundraising for refugees in collaboration with Caritas Poland;
- donations to help our houses and parishes in Ukraine;
- reception of refugees, mainly women and children, to live in our houses;
- reception of refugees by families in the parishes;
- material assistance (food, cleaning supplies) for families in the parishes who have hosted refugees;
- collections of clothing, food, bandages, cleaning supplies and personal hygiene products, transport of these gifts to the reloading point and transferring them to our houses and parishes in Ukraine;
- psychological help;
- help in translation, looking for housing and work;
- running a day care center for mothers with children;
- transportation of refugees from the border to their places of residence;
- cooperation with local authorities (voivodeships, counties, cities, communes) in helping Ukraine;
- two priests coordinate assistance to Ukraine within the province;
- three priests have been volunteers on the border with Ukraine.

Dear Fr. William, I would like to thank you as Provincial Superior and all the members of the American Province for the great help you have given, both spiritually and materially. It is difficult to say which is more important currently... Perhaps soon, as well as material support in raising the country from ruins, Ukraine will need our increased and zealous ministry of reconciliation to patiently rebuild hearts stricken by evil.

I take this opportunity to wish you and the whole Province a beautiful and joyful Easter. May the Risen Christ, who has defeated death and sin, grant us all peace, joy and strength to fulfill our vocation.

Rev. Grzegorz Zembrón, M.S.  
*Provincial Superior*  
*Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette*  
*Province of Mary Queen of Poland*