



Rome27July 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

To all the members of the Dominican Family, warm greetings from Rome!

After three years of demonstrating global Dominican solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are trying to bring hope in situations of violence and war, the Dominican Month for Peace has now become a regular part of the annual programme of our Dominican Family. We started with a Latin American focus on Colombia in 2017. We then moved to an African focus on the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2018. And finally, in 2019, we moved to an Asian focus on India. We now have the pleasure to announce that, for 2020, we will move to Europe where the focus of our annual Dominican Month for Peace will be on Ukraine.

As before, the period of this focus will be Advent, when we are all waiting for the celebration of the mystery of the coming among us of the Prince of Peace. Our focus on peace in Ukraine will therefore start on the First Sunday of Advent (29 November), run for the whole of December, and culminate on the Church's World Day of Peace on 1 January.


Each year, we have noticed a progressively marked increase in the number of solidarity activities organized by Dominican communities in all parts of the world. Masses have been celebrated, creative prayers have been offered, awareness of the focus country has been raised, art forms have been produced, embassies of the focus country have been contacted, and money has been raised for the selected projects. All of these expressions of solidarity have been deeply felt and appreciated by our Dominican Family in these countries. They have been encouraged and strengthened to continue their difficult mission, even in the midst of continuing violence and injustice!

Our focus on India in December, 2019 is still fresh in our minds. In the wake of the Synod on Youth that took place in October, 2018, we tried to reinforce this priority of the Church by including a particular focus on peace as it applies to youth. With this priority in mind, and while forms of violence are prevalent at so many levels of the huge and complex Indian society, our focus was on countering violence, in the form of deprivation and abuse, against children, women and "tribals" (indigenous people), struggles in which many Dominicans are present.

So now, in 2020, we will focus on Ukraine. Even in the midst of the escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the war with Russia and separatists still rages in the eastern Donbass region since April, 2014. Yet people throughout the country feel the impacts of the war. Dominicans are very involved in several processes and projects that promote peace and accompaniment of victims of the conflict. As we did last year; there will be a particular focus on peace as it applies to youth, which is a major concern of the Dominicans there. Thus, while several projects will be highlighted in which the Dominicans in Ukraine are contributing to the search for peace in the country, one project in particular will be the focus of our attention to provide spiritual and financial support. This is the St. Martin de Porres Center in Fastiv, which, for many years, has been caring for socially disadvantaged children: orphans, street children, sick children and children from disadvantaged families. Since the start of hostilities in Eastern Ukraine, the Center has opened its doors to children whose childhood has been poisoned by war. It has adopted more than 220 children from the combat zone, and offered them psychological and spiritual support and the opportunity to recover in a safe environment.

Thank you very much for your cooperation! We pray that, through this small action, solidarity amongst us all can continue to grow and, in turn, enable our preaching mission to have a greater impact in bringing Good News to our world.

In St Dominic,


fr Gerard Timoner
Master of the Order


Sr Cecilia Espenilla

DSI International Promoter for JPIC



fr Mike Deeb

General Promoter for Justice and Peace



TO OUR SISTERS, ASSOCIATES, SUNDAY ASSEMBLY, and FRIENDS,

As we have in past years, we will move through Advent holding in prayer, study, and service our Dominican Family. We are called this year to be conscious of the mission and ministry in the Ukraine. So, we begin with the invitation from Fr. Gerard Timoner, the Master General along with a general introduction to the country of the Ukraine.

The second week, we will explore the story of the Church in the Ukraine and the presence of the Dominican Family there since the 13th century.

In week three, we will focus our attention on the St. Martin de Porres Center in Fastiv, which, for many years, has been caring for socially disadvantaged children: orphans, street children, sick children and children from disadvantaged families. Since the start of hostilities in Eastern Ukraine, the Center has opened its doors to children whose childhood has been poisoned by war. It has

adopted more than 220 children from the combat zone and offered them psychological and spiritual support and the opportunity to recover in a safe environment.

The fourth week remains open to discovery but as it ends with Christmas Day, we invite all to join with us to financially contribute for the ongoing support the St. Martin DePorres Center.

Finally, the Month of Peace will be celebrated on New Year's Eve with a Vesper Service for the Church's World Day of Peace on 1 January.

Maureen Geary OP

Sister Maureen Geary
Councilor

Mary Brigid Clingman OP

Sister Mary Brigid Clingman
Promoter of Justice

UKRAINE

Ukraine is the second-largest country by area in Europe after Russia, with a population of about 42 million, making it the eighth-most populous country in Europe. Its capital and largest city is Kyiv.

During the Middle Ages, the area was a key center of East Slavic culture, with the powerful state of Kyivan Rus' forming the basis of Ukrainian identity. At its height, the state extended from the Black Sea to the Baltic and from the interior of Poland to east of Moscow. Following its fragmentation in the 13th century, the territory was contested, ruled and divided by a variety of powers, including the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and Russia. A Cossack republic emerged and prospered during the 17th and 18th centuries, but its territory was eventually split between Poland and the Russian Empire. In the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, a Ukrainian national movement for self-determination emerged, and the internationally recognized Ukrainian People's Republic was declared on 23 June 1917. After World War II, the western part of Ukraine merged into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, and the whole country became a part of the Soviet Union.



Ukraine gained its independence in 1991, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Following its independence, Ukraine declared itself a neutral state; it formed a limited military partnership with Russia and other Commonwealth of Independent States while also establishing a partnership with NATO in 1994.

In 2013, after the government of President Viktor Yanukovich had decided to suspend the Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement and seek closer economic ties with Russia, a several-months-long wave of demonstrations and protests known as the *Euromaidan* began, which later escalated into the 2014 Ukrainian revolution that led to the overthrow of Yanukovich and the establishment of a new government. These events formed the background for the annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014, and the War in Donbass in April 2014.

This move was widely condemned by the international community. A UN resolution (3/27/2014) "underscores that the referendum having no validity, cannot form the basis for any alteration of the status of [Crimea]" and called upon all states and international organizations not to recognize or to imply the recognition of Russia's annexation. In 2016, the UN General Assembly reaffirmed non-recognition of the annexation and condemned "the temporary occupation of part of the territory of Ukraine—the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol".

By 2020, hostilities in eastern Ukraine entered their sixth year and continue to put civilians' lives and well-being at risk, even as absolute numbers of civilian casualties dropped. Former comedian Volodymyr Zelensky won the presidential election on April 21, 2019. Parliamentary elections in July delivered his party, Servant of the People, a single-party parliamentary majority, for the first time since Ukraine's independence. After taking office, Zelensky demonstrated commitment to carrying out anti-corruption reform and ending the armed conflict with Russia.

In 2019, the environment for media in Ukraine remained unsafe. Violence by far-right groups continued.

In November, Ukraine became the 100th country to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, an international political commitment to make schools safe during times of war. Between January and May 2019, attacks on schools on both sides of the contact line tripled compared with the same period in 2018. Throughout six years of conflict, 147 children were killed. ([Human Rights Watch, World Report 2020](#))

ECONOMY

The economy of Ukraine is an emerging free market economy dependent on industry, agriculture, and services. It grew rapidly from 2000 until 2008 when the Great Recession began. The early 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia, and the War in Donbass that started in the spring of 2014 severely damaged Ukraine's economy. Ukraine is relatively rich in natural resources, particularly in mineral deposits. Although oil and natural gas reserves in the country are largely exhausted, it has other important energy sources, such as coal, hydroelectricity and nuclear fuel raw materials.

It has been difficult for reformists of the economy to take real steps to reduce corruption and curb the outsized political and economic influence of the oligarchs. Mired in a war with Russia, the Ukrainian president cannot bring peace to Donbas without Vladimir Putin's help, but the Kremlin appears intent on continuing the conflict. Since March 2020, the Ukrainian government has steadily abandoned the institutions and ideas responsible for the country's growing macroeconomic stability in recent years. At the same time, Zelensky's team have begun embracing the dangerous objectives of rising inflation and a weakening currency. If this continues, it will deter both domestic and foreign investment while also impeding economic growth. There is no reason to expect significant improvements in the country's economic outlook until Ukraine returns to a policy of macroeconomic stability. ([brookings.edu](#))

ENVIRONMENT

Pollution poses a threat to the environment. Ukraine releases polluted water, heavy metals, organic compounds, and oil-related pollutants. The water supply in some areas of the country contains toxic industrial chemicals up to 10 times the concentration considered to be within safety limits. Air pollution is also a significant environmental problem in the Ukraine.

Environmental policy in Ukraine springs from several provisions of the Constitution of Ukraine. They are:

- the right to ensure ecological safety in Ukraine,
- the right of citizens to healthy and safe environment, and
- the right to free access to information regarding the environment.

The basic principles of the national environmental policy are similar to those of EU countries, and of Central and Eastern European countries integrating into Europe. But at this stage likeness comes to the end.

The main governmental body of Ukraine in the sphere of environment is Ministry of Environmental Protection responsible for protection and administration of environment. Companies as legal entities are subjects of regulation in Ukraine. Obviously, Ukraine's regulatory framework requires considerable reform to introduce integrated pollution prevention and control and integrated permitting. The reform should include both adjustment of the current environmental legislation and adoption of a new law which would cover key elements of integrated permitting.



On April 26, 1986, a safety test gone wrong led to an explosion in reactor #4 at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in Pripyat, Ukraine. Several factors then conspired to result in an unprecedented, widespread scattering of over 100 radioactive elements into the surrounding towns and cities. The region is expected to remain uninhabitable for thousands of years. While contamination in the water supply has improved, the levels of radioactivity in the soil remain higher than the 30-year half-life would predict. ([HG Legal Resources](#))

ARTS/CULTURE

Ukraine possesses a wealth of cultural talent and a considerable cultural legacy. Numerous writers have contributed to the country's rich literary history. Impressive monuments of architecture and museums displaying works by generations of Ukrainian artists can be found throughout the country, and art galleries featuring contemporary Ukrainian artists have become commonplace in larger urban centers. The country's strong tradition of folk art also continues to this day. In addition, high caliber performing artists and ensembles appear regularly in Ukraine's numerous theatres and concert halls.

Cultural pursuits and entertainment are widespread. Most of Ukraine's major cities have ornate theatres with their own opera or ballet companies. Song-and-dance ensembles, most notably the Verovka State Chorus and the Virsky Dance Ensemble, have made Ukrainian folk music and dance into an impressive stage art. Though classical music remains popular, contemporary Western-style music has expanded its audience considerably and now dominates the airwaves on numerous commercial radio stations ([Britannica](#))

