



WEEK TWO

THE CHURCH OF UKRAINE and the DOMINICAN PRESENCE

Historical background

Church tradition has it that St. Andrew the Apostle first preached the Christian message in the Ukrainian heartland in the early years after Jesus' death, but in practice the establishment of the faith can be traced to its adoption by Princess Olga of Kyiv, and later by her grandson, Vladimir of Kyiv, who made it the state religion following his own conversion. Vladimir's emissaries, having traveled to Constantinople to learn about the faith, are famously reported to have said that the Byzantine liturgy they witnessed there was so beautiful that "We no longer knew whether we were in heaven or on earth." The year of Vladimir's baptism, 988, is commonly cited as the year when Christianity was established in the lands that are now Ukraine and Russia. ([Catholics Cultures](#))

Metropolitan (Bishop) Michael I of Kiev is considered to be the first Metropolitan of Kiev and All-Rus' from 988-992. He is traditionally credited as founding the St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery in Kiev which has served as the Cathedral Church at various times in history. While, at one time, one of the richest monasteries of the country, it has also been destroyed and rebuilt several times in its thousand-year history.



When the Great Schism divided the Eastern and Western Churches in 1054, the Kyivan Church sided with the Orthodox East. In 1596, when most of the western half of modern-day Ukraine was ruled by Poland, a group of bishops from the Orthodox Church returned to communion with Rome through an agreement known as the Union of Brest, which established the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. In the following century more dioceses accepted the Union, and the Greek Catholic Church flourished across a broad swath of what is now Ukraine.

In 1939, Stalin sent his Red Army into western Ukraine, prior to this it was the eastern part of the country that took the brunt of his sadistic brutality. There was now only one major force in his way, the Catholic Church. Half of the Catholics in Ukraine had been deported and dozens of priests executed. In 1939, the order came down from Stalin to intensify the persecution of the Roman Catholic Church in western Ukraine, liquidate it by terror if its leaders could not be bought outright. Everything the Church owned was confiscated, convents, schools, hospitals, the Catholic press, and many Catholic churches were burnt to the ground. It was during the height of the persecution, in 1941, that the Nazis drove the Reds out of Ukraine. With Germany's defeat in WWII, the communists reconsolidated their hold in Ukraine, half the

Catholic clergy were sent to prison and one- fifth were exiled; the schismatic orthodox took over all the Catholic churches and all Church properties were seized by the atheistic state. ([Religious Information Service of Ukraine](#))

During World War II and the subsequent absorption of Ukraine into the USSR, the Church was subsumed by Russia into the Russian Orthodox Church. In 1963, the church was again recognized as Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church through the efforts of its Major Archbishop Yosyf Slipyi despite difficulties with both the Kremlin and the Vatican.

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church is the largest Eastern Catholic Church in the world. Currently it has approximately 4.1 million members. Within Ukraine itself, the UGCC is the second largest religious organization in terms of number of communities within the Catholic church. In terms of number of members, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church ranks third among the population of Ukraine after the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. The church has followed the spread of the Ukrainian diaspora and now has some 40 hierarchs (bishops) in over a dozen countries on four continents, including three other metropolitan bishops in Poland, the United States, and Canada.

The Provincial Vicariate of Ukraine of Saint Michael the Archangel

([Dominicans in Ukraine](#))

Since the early thirteenth century, when the **first Dominicans arrived in Kyiv**, the history of our Order has been mingled with the history of Kievan Rus. The Dominican Province of Rus, which included much of today's Russia and Ukraine, existed until the end of the Second World War. At that time, many Dominicans were expelled from the Soviet Union. Others were executed. Sometimes entire communities were killed at once. During the Soviet period, a few Polish Dominicans came secretly to these lands to serve the people, who desperately needed pastoral care.

Beginning in 1993, our Order officially returned to Ukraine, and then also to Russia, and the General Vicariate of Saint Michael the Archangel was formed. Today, there are six Dominican residences in Ukraine. We are trying to rebuild, where possible, churches that were destroyed and to bring regular religious life back to this region. It is not always easy to restore damaged properties in poor areas where local officials may be unfriendly to our Order. Even so, besides establishing the Thomas Aquinas Institute and organizing student chaplaincies and an orphanage, we have been able to rebuild several churches and chapels to a high standard. Beyond that, we run our own publishing house, Kairos.

Kievan Rus was a powerful East Slavic state dominated by the city of Kiev. Shaped in the 9th century, it flourished for the next 300 years. The empire is traditionally seen as the beginning of Russia and the ancestor of Belarus and Ukraine.

([Russiapedia](#))

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 Saint Dominic and guided by God's compassionate hand.

FAITHFUL TO OUR HERITAGE

Sadok and 48 Dominican martyrs from Sandomierz were Roman Catholic, Dominican martyrs killed by Mongols (Golden Horde) during the Second Mongol invasion of Poland in 1260. As homage to the deaths of these martyrs, Dominican friars were given special dispensation allowing the usage of red belts in their habits. ([Wikipedia](#))

The Dominican Order first arrived in Lviv during the 13th century and the first wooden church, Corpus Christi, is said to have been built in 1234. That church burned down during a war in 1340. A new Gothic church, was built on the present site in 1378 and later rebuilt after a fire in 1407 along with the monastery buildings. During the 16th century, the complex was ravaged by several fires, nevertheless it continued to gradually rise in prosperity. In the 18th century, the church's ceiling started cracking and it was decided in 1745 that the church had to be taken apart and replaced with a new one which was consecrated in 1764 by the Latin archbishop of Lviv Wacław Hieronim Sierakowski.

The Dominicans managed to safely survive through the reign of the Austrian emperor [Joseph II](#), who closed many other monasteries. After World War II, the complex was occupied by the Soviets, used as a warehouse, and in the 1970s changed into a *museum of religion and atheism*.



The church in its original form has not survived to this day, because it was rebuilt several times. This majestic structure we see today was erected before the First World War. After the arrival of the Soviet authorities in this area, the service in the church was stopped, and, in 1959, its premises were turned into a warehouse of the city market. In 1989, the church was returned to the Dominican Fathers and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. It was renamed the **Church of the Holy Eucharist**. The monastery, however, has not yet been returned and still serves as a museum renamed *The Lviv Museum of History of Religion*. ([Discover Ukraine](#))

In the main altar, there was a copy of the image of the Mother of God of the Rosary. The history of the image of the Mother of God of the Rosary dates back to the end of the 15th century. In 1654, the Dominicans moved the shrine to Lviv and later, in 1663, King Jan Casimir during a military campaign in Moscow, presented it to the Dominican Fathers in Chortkiv. In 1945, the relic was transported to Krakow, where it was preserved.

DOMINICAN ORDER CAME TO BELZ IN 1394 at the invitation of Prince Zemovit. Soon a wooden church and a convent were built in the city. In the middle of the XVI century, they were replaced with stone buildings.

In 1772, Belz fell under the rule of the Habsburg monarchy, and in 1785, the monastery was liquidated as a **"not performing any useful work."** The church was transferred to the Greek-Catholic community of the city and renamed St. Nicholas church. From the wooden church, the Holy Spirit iconostasis and individual icons were moved to the St. Nicholas. In 1861, the domes of the church were covered with copper and the church itself was covered with white plate.



In 1951, the city of Belz was part of a territorial exchange between Poland and the USSR. The Polish community, leaving the city, took away the whole church structure and the parish archives. In the Soviet period, the church was a warehouse. In 1991 it was returned to the Greek-Catholic community.

During its existence, the building underwent renovations, the largest of which occurred at the beginning of the XVIII century. At that time, the monastery tower was built, which is still preserved. The bell tower was built as a two-tiered baroque edifice. In 1920, a clock was installed on it, and the building itself was converted into the city hall. Today it hosts the city council of Belz. Both buildings were restored in 2006.

In 2004, on the third floor of the tower, the only surviving mural paintings of the monastery were found. The remaining buildings of the monastery were lost in 1944 when the Soviet artillery left only fragments of walls from the church itself.

Church of St. Stanislaus: Chortkiv

The Dominican Order came to Chortkiv (Western Ukraine/Poland) in the year 1522 and remained until 1946. The history of the church and monastery of the Dominican Fathers dates back to February 22, 1610 - from the time when the owner of the city, Stanislav Golsky, invited them to found a Catholic parish and monastery to be known as St. Stanislaus. A church was built in Chortkiv, and a monastery was built around it. Surrounded by a high wall with defensive towers, it served as a hiding place for locals during the Tatar attacks. The following facts are interesting: the Dominican Church of St. Stanislaw was visited in Chortkiv by two Polish kings: Jan Casimir (1663) and Jan III Sobieski (1683).



Dominican Institute of Religious Sciences of St. Thomas Aquinas (Kiev)

International Peace Conference: In 2018 – 2019, an International conference took place in France and Ukraine consisting of 4 seminars focused on "*What peace plan is possible between Russia and Ukraine?*". Scientists, religious and public figures from Ukraine, Russia and the European Union participated in it at various stages. The main purpose of the conference was to explore ways of overcoming tensions between Ukraine and Russia and to understand how interstate and intercultural ties between Ukraine and Russia could be further developed. Representatives of the Dominicans participated in the conference as part of the Ukrainian delegation and the Dominican Institute of Religious Sciences of St. Thomas Aquinas in Kiev hosted one of the seminars of the conference.

Capacitating Christian community leaders to be facilitators of reconciliation in their local communities or settlements

Since September 2019, a Social Leadership School has been established at the Institute of Religious Sciences of St. Thomas Aquinas, located in the convent of the Dominican friars in Kiev. In collaboration with the Christian Rescue Service, the main purpose of this program is to develop active and responsible Christian leaders. Open to people of all denominations, the courses (covering broad themes of Catholic Social Teachings) prepare the participants to be promoters of peaceful coexistence and facilitators of reconciliation among different nationalities and religious denominations in their local communities.

Currently, about 30 people from different regions of Ukraine study at the School of Social Leadership. A significant number of them are community leaders of settlements in the area of military conflict who return with skills in peacebuilding.

NEXT WEEK: THE SPONSORED MINISTRIES OF THE PROVINCE