

Rome, March 25, 2022  
*Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord*

Prot. N. 00237/22

**To All the Friars  
In Their Locations**

**Subject:** The developing situation in Ukraine

Dear Brothers,

Throughout the world, there have been more than a few instances where our friars have been called to face scenarios of war and difficult situations; I am sure, however, that during recent days each of you has been following the sad events in Ukraine with particular attention. For this reason, I believe it is important to share at least some information about the friars involved more directly— regarding both their own living conditions and to the work that many are doing in response to those who suddenly find themselves in great need.

The information that comes from the Provincial Minister of Krakow, which I have reproduced below in generous excerpts, could help us well.

***The war in Ukraine - current situation***

March 21, 2022

***Ukraine***

*“In Ukraine we have 36 friars living in 7 communities. The Custody of Ukraine belongs to the Province of Krakow (Poland), half of them are Ukrainian friars, half Polish. For now, all our brothers in Ukraine, thank God, are alive and have not suffered any physical or material damage. This is due to the fact that the main military operations are taking place ... where we do not have a presence, except in Kiev. This place, as is well known, is always a target of the Russian offensive. Our friary, however, is located on the eastern bank of the Dnieper River, while the attack mainly concerns the western bank. Nevertheless, the brothers together with the people are undergoing all the tragedies of the war: many people find refuge in religious houses and churches, especially during the bombings...; refugees fleeing in large numbers towards the Polish border are received in all the religious houses (many stop for one/two days in the friary and continue towards the west), many cross the border and are welcomed in Poland (currently there are more than 2 million), others prefer to stay in Ukrainian territory (they stop where the situation is safer: near the border and in the Transcarpathian part of Ukraine. There, we are present in two places: Lviv and Uzhgorod). Our friars bring the comfort of faith as well as humanitarian comfort to people who seek refuge at our facilities; they distribute food, celebrate the sacraments, organize prayers and the daily life of refugees in our houses. Some are army chaplains, some are in charge of bringing food with trucks to parts of Ukraine where there is nothing left to eat. There is daily telephone contact with the brothers. The situation is briefly described by the Custos, Bro Blazej, who is in Kiev and shares with all the friars of the Province on a daily basis.*

## **Russia**

*In Russia, there are five brothers in two communities: in Voronezh and in Bielgorod. Everyone is fine, although the repercussions of the war are reaching them too: the military airport is located in Bielgorod; the borders of Ukraine with the European Union are closed, - (we can imagine what kind of attention is needed!) - life has become more expensive. Thank God we are able to maintain telephone contact with them.*

## **Poland**

*Although they have no direct contact with the war, the brothers are committed to dealing with its effects: welcoming refugees (for now there are about 70 people in our friaries, and over 300 have passed through them, making short stops); about twenty friars are involved as volunteers on the border with Ukraine to organize the initial reception of refugees; some work in railway stations which have become reception points; the friars made a personal commitment to bring food and humanitarian aid by traveling by car from Poland to Ukraine; in retreat houses, children are received from orphanages. An attempt is being made to organize humanitarian transport (food, medicine, cleaning agents) in Ukraine, especially to the friars of Lviv and Uzhgorod.*

## **Economics**

*Since the beginning of the war, many provinces of the Order, individual fraternities, state institutions and individuals have sent cash offerings to the Custody of Ukraine. Current income (3/18/2022) is as follows: 201.582 PLN; EUR 104,317; 10,000 USD.*

*Thanks be to God and to our benefactors! For now, we are trying to use the products that are arriving through humanitarian channels organized by Caritas (food, medicines, chemicals). The money is used for emergencies (until present, at one of the friaries in Ukraine - for specialized medicines: PLN 8,000) and will continue to be used after the war to help people get back to normal life."*

The accounts listed under the General Curia have also received about 100,000.00 Euros so far. Thanks to everyone, with special mention to the many lay people who have desired to contribute with offerings both small and large. So far, we have intervened with a little more than 40,000.00 Euros, advanced by the Province of Warsaw, to support the friars of the Custody of Belarus, who are also in a challenging situation due to the strong devaluation of currency as well as difficulties with accessing banks. If the border between Belarus and Poland remains open, it will be possible to have a more accessible corridor for aid and communication. On the refugee reception front, there is a constant rate of intake in our houses located in the other nations bordering Ukraine. In a like fashion, all of Europe is studying the conditions for being able to help the refugees. I can only support all the efforts that are being made.

I think it would be fair to mention here our gratitude to the Provinces who have allowed us, during this time, to also help in a significant way our brothers in Lebanon, who are living in a very difficult situation on an economic level, but who do not cease to assist with, as much as they

can, the excessive situations of poverty. We applaud them for the testimony they provide and for the presence (the only one remaining) that they are trying to maintain in Syria.

Today, on the Solemnity of the Annunciation, the Pope once again consecrates Russia and Ukraine and the whole world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in a solemn act that actively involves all of us.

As we all take part, we also ask for the powerful protection of the Mother of God. From her, we invoke strength, support, and care for our friars. May the Mother of God be a great help for them in their generosity, in the comfort they bring to all who suffer, and in the mercy they show toward the dead.

Brothers, I can say to you firmly: continue to serve without fear, even at the risk of your health and your life! It is a great gift you are giving to us all! Thank you on the part of the entire Order.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Br. Roberto Genuin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Br. Roberto Genuin  
General Minister OFMCap