



Media Release for 09.12.2022

## **Interview with Bishop Mykola Bychok from the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy**

**Bishop Mykola, you recently asked *Aid to the Church in Need* for assistance for the Ukrainian Eparchy here in Australia and we were pleased this was granted. How will this support help the Ukrainian Eparchy in Australia?**

It is very important for the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Australia today to be close to our people. We all know that Ukraine has been at war for more than 8 months. However, what is happening so far within Australia also has a great impact on the Ukrainian community. That is why we as a church need to support our faithful scattered throughout the Eparchy in a special way.

The Eparchy of Sts Peter and Paul of Melbourne is large in territory and includes all of Australia, New Zealand, and Oceania which causes great expenses for priests in visiting our faithful. Thanks to the generous help of “Aid to the Church in Need”, our clergy will be able to provide pastoral care to the faithful in Australia in places like the city of Darwin , the island of Tasmania, as well as cities like Wellington, Auckland and Christchurch in New Zealand.

On the other hand, this assistance will help our Eparchy organize spiritual and intellectual formation for our clergy in 2023 and. In order to properly take care of our faithful, it is necessary first of all for the clergy to be well prepared for this mission, and be well supported both practically and spiritually.

**Can you describe how the Ukrainian Eparchy in Australia has been affected by the terrible war that is currently unfolding in Ukraine?**

On 24th of February 2022, the war in Ukraine began. This date changed the lives of many people in Ukraine, Australia, and around the world. Because of the war, many Ukrainians were forced to leave their homes and save their families by fleeing to other countries. Thanks to the government, humanitarian visas for displaced persons from Ukraine were made available in Australia. More than 9,000 visas have been issued to date, of which around 4,500 people have already flown to Australia. Many of the displaced are women and children who, due to the military laws of Ukraine concerning men of mature age and their requirement to remain in Ukraine to assist in the defence of the country, has seen many families experience separation and the death of loved ones over very great distances from Ukraine, where their spouses and loved ones remain. Unfortunately, on 31st of July, Australia officially closed the humanitarian visa program for Ukrainians. This has caused great suffering and devastation for families who have been separated due to the war, and makes their eventual re-union very difficult.

Our churches and the homes of many Ukrainians have remained the constant place of assistance for displaced persons from Ukraine. Many people who came to Australia, mostly with their children, are very hurt. Some of them have psychological injuries and a sense of guilt for leaving Ukraine and their relatives. That is why our clergy, together with the Ukrainian community, are doing everything to help heal spiritual wounds and make their life easier in their new place of residence.

**Are you able to give us an update on the situation in Ukraine now?**

Today, the enemy uses a tactic in warfare called “famine and cold”. Since the beginning of the war, the Russians have been massively exporting grain from the occupied territories of Ukraine. During the summer, the occupiers deliberately attacked the planted fields in order to destroy the wheat crop through fire and provoke a “famine” in Ukraine and other countries dependent on Ukrainian grain supplies. It is worth noting that according to the 2020 world grain rating, Ukraine ranked 1st in sunflower production, 2nd in barley supply, 4th in corn and 5th in wheat. Ukraine is a very important guarantor of food security in the world on the international grain market.

Russia also uses “cold” as a means of war. Now that winter has come to Ukraine and a great many resources are needed to heat hospitals, schools and houses, Russia is purposefully carrying out massive attacks on power plants, gas plants, and water supply facilities. Just think, on 10th of October alone, the occupiers launched 84 cruise missiles and 24 drones which destroyed many infrastructure facilities throughout the country. This is the second such massive attack after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24th of February. In fact, just a few days ago, I had a conversation with a priest from Kyiv city, the capital of Ukraine, who described the situation prevailing there at the moment. He said that seventy five percent of every day there is no power, no heating, no internet connection. This causes great suffering during the winter, as the people are unable to cook, or to heat their homes, and are deprived of the most basic of civilised conveniences. It is difficult to believe that things like this are actually happening in the twenty-first century.

**Is there anything further you would like to say to benefactors of Aid to the Church in Need and how their offerings have helped to keep the faith alive within the Ukrainian Eparchy?**

I would like to thank you for your generous support of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Australia, New Zealand and Oceania. It is not easy to keep the faith when your relatives, acquaintances or friends are under fire in Ukraine. Very often this raises a single question: where is God? But God is where there is patience, troubles and trial. Your charity becomes God’s hands in these circumstances of life. May the Lord richly reward all benefactors of the “Aid to the Church in Need” for the offerings given to the Australian Eparchy.

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