

Views from the Pews

St. Stephen Protomartyr Ukrainian Catholic Church

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LIVING PEARL ORPHANAGE

Letter from Ruslan Markiv, director of the Family Home "Living Pearl"

Dear David,

Slava naviky!

All 30 boys from the Family Home "Living Pearl" aged from 8 to 16 with two adults (myself and a volunteer from Ireland Noel Maher) moved from Ukraine to Czech Republic on March 11th 2022. It was a very difficult decision to make but the safety of the children prompted us to leave our beloved home and go to another country.

The news about the Russian invasion reached us in our home early on February 24th 2022. It was a big shock for all of us. Most people in our area refused to believe Russia was going to invade our

country despite all the alarming news and indications. So, when the invasion started many people were shocked and devastated. Though we are located in the western part of Ukraine and it was obvious we were not going to be occupied or become a place of combat any time soon the clear signs of the war were around us right away - long lines in front of the banks, food stores and gas stations; 13 men from Bortnyky were conscripted to the army in the first days of the war; multitudes of people from the eastern, southern and central parts of Ukraine filled our roads, villages and cities. The peaceful life of the whole country and its inhabitants was ruined.



St Stephen Protomartyr Ukrainian Catholic Church supports a number of charities in the Ukraine. One of them is the Living Pearl Orphanage located in Bortnyky (75 km south of Lviv). The war has impacted all those who live in the Ukraine and their stories need to be shared. Over the next few months, as I get these stories for the various charities that the church supports, they will be published in the Pews News.

God Bless,

David Franko – Charity Director

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Our orphanage is based in a small village and enjoys a lot of autonomy in various ways. It was a big help for us as we were able to control a lot of information our boys were receiving. Of course they knew about the war early in the morning on February 24 because everyone was talking about it. But there were no bombs, skirmishes, tanks or soldiers around them. In the late afternoon of that day we all gathered together in our recreation room, I explained to the boys the reality of the situation and we watched some news together. Then we talked more about the war and its consequences for all of us. We were able to keep our regular life with almost all its aspects for two more weeks - the boys went to school, worked outside, had sport and recreational activities but the pressure to move them to a safer place was growing day by day. Being personally responsible for these children and their well-being, I was gradually moving to the decision to leave Ukraine and go abroad despite all the difficulties and challenges. During the first few weeks of the war I received a few phone calls from our local bishop His Eminence Taras Senkiv. He encouraged me to find a way to take all the children abroad. Eventually his advice and encouragement helped to make the final decision and we started planning the move.

Our long lasting friends and benefactors from Caritas in Czech city Olomouc agreed to help us. They organized transport, negotiated the necessary arrangements with the Slovakian border and prepared a place for us in Czech Republic in a village called Loukov in the Zlin region. After our arrival they also helped us to get through all the necessary registration processes. All the boys and myself received a one year visa, medical insurance and social payment from the Czech government. Our volunteer Noel Maher, as a citizen of Ireland, was not able to get these benefits but it was not a problem at all. He was allowed to stay in the country and help us and that was good enough.

We have been living in the new place for a month now. The boys easily took the news about going abroad, many of them were even excited to go on a long trip and see another country. But by now the excitement is over and many of them are saying they are missing home and would like to go back. Our life differs here from what it was in Ukraine. We try to keep some kind of schedule, have regular lessons as well as work, sport and recreational activities. It is very helpful that we stay together in one place as a family. But still the difference is obvious and possibilities to replace the usual lifestyle are limited. The local people are great here! God bless all of them! We were welcomed heartedly, are visited often and helped in various ways. Hopefully their warmth and generosity will help the boys to adjust to the new place and lifestyle soon. We also pray and hope that the war will be over as soon as possible and we will return home. As we all know - east or west home is the best!

With regards,

Ruslan Markiv, director of the Family Home "Living Pearl"

