

To my dear Salesian confreres throughout the world
To our dear Salesian Family throughout the world

Dear brothers and sisters throughout the world,
My greetings and expression of affection to you all in all the different places where we are found as Don Bosco's family.

You can easily guess the reasons driving me to write this letter, in which I wish to express and share not only concern but also the need to support and commit ourselves on behalf of the dear Ukrainian population, through our Salesian brothers and sisters, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians who are part of this nation, and united in fraternal communion with some Salesian Family Groups who live in Ukraine: Salesian Cooperators, members of the Association of Mary Help of Christians, etc.....

I am sure we all feel pain in our hearts for what the Ukrainian people are suffering. We too, as the Salesian Family of Don Bosco, and I personally, on behalf of all groups, feel the duty to cry "No to war!" while begging for this conflict to end and asking (and praying) for peace to come soon. Indeed, the loss of human life can never find justification, since they are the most sacred element of our God's creation.

We grieve these deaths. We grieve for so many people who mourn the death of their loved ones. We are deeply affected because of lives cut short and so many injured.

For my part, I have already expressed to Fr Mykhaylo Chaban, Superior of the Vice-province of Mary Help of Christians, Ukraine, our communion, fraternal support and desire to help with all the means at our disposal.

I have done the same with Fr Marcin Kaznowski, the Provincial of South Poland whose headquarters are in Krakow. The Latin Rite presences in Ukraine (Odessa, Bibrka, Peremyshlany and Korostyshiv) belong to this Province. Our Salesian confreres, and our Sisters, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, know that we wish to be at their side in these difficult times.

At the same time, it is wonderful to see the increasing flow of solidarity, something we want to channel (including with the indications of this letter of mine).

Despite the pain suffered by so many people, we are not aware of any personal damage. I have learned that the military authorities in Lviv have asked us to transfer the dozens of underage boys living with us in our reception house. That is why we have had to bring these young people to our presences in Slovakia, and they are being welcomed there. I am especially grateful to the confreres of the Province of Slovakia, in the person of the Provincial. Fr Peter Timko, who has provided all the necessary arrangements for these boys to be cared for, assisted and protected. We thank God for this.

Undoubtedly, in the minds of everyone, especially those who wish to do something about this painful situation, the question arises: how can we help?

First of all, as I have already said, with our affection, solidarity, by siding with those who have suffered and are suffering this unjust aggression. I am sure of the fact that there are millions of Russians who do not want war; and that it is only their rulers who want it and are doing it.

We must also put before the Lord the pain of a world which, though redeemed by our Lord, continues to bleed and suffer today.

Certainly we must and can intervene with financial aid. I am aware of several initiatives already in place:

1. *Missioni Don Bosco*, Turin, is promoting a campaign to collect aid for the Ukraine in the immediate emergency. In dialogue with me, we have agreed to think above all about the post-emergency, about how to meet the needs that will arise when the war is no longer “front page news”, thanks be to God!
2. The *Misiones Salesianas* Mission Office, Madrid, is already allocating the first lot of funds to cover basic needs. It will also try to plan, as mentioned above, for the phase following this emergency.
3. The Salesian Lombardo-Emiliana (ILE) Province together with the “Opera don Bosco onlus” Foundation, has taken protective action in agreement with the Superior of the Ukraine Vice-province, Fr Mykhaylo.
4. The Salesian Venezia-Mestre (INE) Province has made direct arrangements with the Rector Major to help in any way possible.
5. The Salesian community in Vatican City has sent 20,000 Euro to the Rector Major for the most urgent needs in Ukraine.
6. The Irish Salesian Province has begun a collection of basic necessities and has allocated some funds to be used for the emergency in Ukraine.
7. In Germany, “Don Bosco Mission Bonn” has launched a campaign to collect funds as well as an awareness-raising campaign.
8. The Salesian Mission Office in Warsaw, too, in the early hours of war breaking out in Ukraine, has been active in raising funds and sending humanitarian aid.
9. Before this emergency, even the European network of Salesian youth organisations (Don Bosco Youth Net), in line with what I have expressed, and in its own area of competence, has shared indications and guidelines among the organisations of its network on work for the rights and the reception of refugees, organisation and involvement in solidarity, charity and peace awareness initiatives.

And no doubt many other initiatives will arise that I am not yet aware of

However, one question remains: how do we coordinate our efforts to make this aid of ours effective?

I will suggest one immediate way, but first I want to restate a principle: *during this emergency we all want this aid to go to people most in need, those displaced, those who have lost everything they own, those who do not know how to carry on living at the moment...* As I said, we are very clear who we are and must be, as I said: just a mediation, a conduit to convey the help that so many people are already offering to those most in need.

After that, of course, we will continue to think of ways to help boys and girls who have been left without a father and/or mother, without being able to study, without good prospects for the immediate future. In this, our presences as Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will undoubtedly be of great help.

How can the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians deliver this help now and in the future?

- In the case of the Salesians, it is necessary to keep in touch through the two Provincials in Ukraine (with the Eastern Rite Vice-Province and the houses of the Greek-Catholic Rite belonging to the Province of Poland-Krakow). Therefore with Fr Mykhaylo Chaban and Fr Marcin Kaznowski: whoever wants to contact them directly can do so.
- From Salesian Headquarters in Rome, in agreement with the Economer General and the Missions Sector, I have authorised Fr George Menampampil to coordinate the aid that arrives here, as was done for the Covid-19 outbreak.
- In particular, everything that comes directly to the Rector Major for this purpose, or to the *Don Bosco Nel Mondo* Foundation, or to the Rector Major's Solidarity Fund, will be coordinated jointly, in dialogue with Fr George Menampampil.
- Personally, I suggest that Mission Offices operate autonomously, but by informing one another and coordinating among themselves; I also suggest that other aid from Provinces around the world be sent directly to Headquarters as I have indicated. From here we will coordinate as effectively as possible, always with a focus on the people who are going through this dramatic time.

Let me conclude this letter by asking all of you to pray fervently to the Lord, asking for the intercession of Mary, who is the Help of Christians, Our Lady of difficult times. Let us pray intensely for an end to war.

A fraternal embrace full of affection and hope for the coming of Peace.

Ángel Fernández Artime, SDB
Rector Major