

The Catholic Outreach to Neighbors in Ukraine

January 2025

With God, we shall provide!

BY ROMELLA RYAN, PRESIDENT

For much of the world, it's hard to believe that the war has been devastating our brethren in Ukraine for nearly three years. The media coverage has waned and the general populus has lost interest. But there are angels among us! In the year 2024, the Catholic Outreach to Neighbors in Ukraine (CONU) saw growth in the demand to help our brothers and sisters in Ukraine. However, God is great and his faithful are amazing!

The parish at Pax Christi in Lone Tree, CO, established a new ministry as part of the expanding CONU organization. The response from parishioners has been remarkable and inspiring. Their first campaign coincided with the Advent season and was fittingly entitled "Bring a Pax Christi Christmas to Ukraine". The campaign has brought renewed awareness and drive to bring the Peace of Christ (Pax Christi) to the weary. Donations were amazing!

Executive Director and pastor Fr. Tomasz Jamka inspired his parishioners during all homilies at a weekend awareness event at Holy Apostles Church in Colorado Springs. CONU provided a presentation about our history, missions, and current initiatives. The donation response was jaw-dropping. After Mass, one-on-one conversations with parishioners were informative and engaging.

We continue to be blessed to be in regular contact with intermediaries in Ukraine. They remind us that the lives of their people continue to be encompassed by fear as they struggle to find personal safety from continual bombings, disruption of power, and lack of food and supplies. Despite deprivation imposed by the Russians, the resilient people remain hopeful and faithful in their resolve. The gratitude they express is so heartwarming.

Bottom line, the requests for assistance have grown but the faithful have more than overcome the needs with amazing generosity and prayers. Besides the parish events, we continue to be blessed by bighearted recurring donors. We also have been most fortunate to have new donors whose impactful charity is miraculous. Yes, there are angels among us... both in Ukraine and the US!

CONU is proud to continue its 29-year history to provide consistent humanitarian aid to Ukraine to help maintain their resolve. CONU's highlights for support in 2024 were:

- Continued reliable aid to the House of Hope for Single Mothers and Children
- Aid for refugees and needy in Sumy, Lubny, Myrgorod, Lutsk, and John Paul II Center
- Aid to provide meals, fuel, treatment and supplies for war zone victims in the Kharkiv Diocese
- Funding for EWTN children publications

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR 2024 DONORS

From Hebrews 6:10 "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them."

CONU is Growing, Alive, and Very Well!

Father Andrzej Szczesnowicz was close to Father Paul Wicker, a co-founder of CONU. Now serving as the pastor at Pax Christi in Lone Tree CO, he welcomed the other co-founder, then Father, now Bishop, Vitaly Skomarovsky during his visit in September 2023. After presentations about awareness of the current situation in Ukraine, Father Andrzej was moved to do more. Subsequently, CONU board members met with him and other Pax Christi representatives to brainstorm possibilities. After sessions with the parish council facilitated by Dennis Thumann, it was decided that Pax Christi would organize a new ministry.

The charter of the new ministry is to provide awareness to the parish about the needs of the Ukrainian people, promote prayer, and help obtain aid through donations to further propagate the CONU missions in the Ukraine by helping the hungry, sick, oppressed, and poor, while restoring their human dignity and faith after collapse of the Soviet Union. Once the ministry was approved, gatherings were held with parishioners to share how they could help. Response was wonderful! About 30 parishioners attended and the ministry is in full swing. The ministry is led by Paul Sciera and Ben Stancati. Additionally, Paul serves as a new member on CONU's Board of Directors.

The ministry's first initiative was a campaign entitled **Send a Pax Christi Christmas to Ukraine**. Pax Christi, meaning the peace of Christ, is so fitting for a country struggling with the turmoil of war every day. The campaign coincided with Advent Season and was publicized in their weekly newsletters and introduced by Paul during Mass. It has been a huge success!



Figure 1. Ben Stancati and Paul Sciera with campaign ad.

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Awareness and prayers are some great intangible benefits from the campaign. Donations from online contributions and collections totaled over \$7,000. What an amazing first campaign by the Pax Christi community!

Father Tomasz Jamka, the pastor at Holy Apostles in Colorado Springs, now serves as the Executive Director of CONU after the passing of Father Paul Wicker. Similarly to Father Andrzej, he was inspired to follow in Father Paul's footsteps. He requested the CONU board to setup up an awareness event for all masses on the weekend of 9-10 November. Board members jumped into action handling logistics, publicity, presentation, and execution. At each Mass, Father Tom introduced CONU and CONU VP Ken Rackers provided a short presentation on CONU's history, objectives, and missions.



Figure 2. Holy Apostles parishioners receive awareness presentation

After Mass, CONU representatives provided more details about current initiatives and entertained questions from parishioners. Brochures were distributed to provide more information including links to CONU's website. Between the second collection at all masses and online donations the result was nearly \$20,000. Jesus is most definitely in the hearts of the Holy Apostles' parishioners.



Figure 3. Setup for parishioners in the Holy Apostles vestibule

Another sign of CONU's growth in 2024 was the addition of two new board members. With the increased presence of CONU at Pax Christi, board members thought it wise and most appropriate to add a member from their community. Consequently, Paul Sciera was nominated and selected to serve on the board. Paul's heritage has direct ties to Ukraine. He was born in Germany to a Polish father and Ukrainian mother. His faith centered around a Ukrainian Catholic Church in upstate New York where he served as an altar boy and where he was married. With relatives still in Ukraine, Paul has a vested interest in helping with the CONU missions.

Also, Pax Christi parishioner Ben Stancati is a right-hand man for Paul and a valued consultant to the CONU Board. Ben, like Paul, is an active member of the Pax Christi Knights of Columbus council and facilitates awareness and fundraising events.

Another new board member is Laurie Walcott. Laurie is a long-time supporter and donor to CONU. She is inspired by the "flagrant breach of international law" imposed by the Russians on the Ukrainian people. Her compassion is evident when she says that CONU is composed of "unknown friends afar (that) wish them well". She states "I can't change history here, but I sleep better because even if it's modest, I can at least do something." She is a most welcomed addition to the CONU Board.

CONU Board of Directors	
Fr. Tomasz Jamka	Chaplain, Executive Director
Romella Ryan	Board President
Ken Rackers	Board Vice President
Greg Sullivan	Board Managing Director
Jim Dalrymple	Board Member
Joe Ryman	Board Member, Treasurer
Jim Ryan	Board Member
Steve Fleet	Board Member
Paul Sciera	Board Member
Laurie Walcott	Board Member

Table 1. CONU Board of Directors

Distributions Increase as War Continues

The year 2024 surpassed all others with requests for aid. The war has taken its toll on the Ukrainian people, churches and homes, food and supplies, utilities, and schools. The CONU board has tried our best to solicit needs, assess priorities, and distribute essential funding. We have worked with our intermediaries in Kharkiv, Korotych, Kiev, Lutsk, Myrgorod, Kam'yanets-Podil's'kyi,

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Lubny, and Sumy to understand how we can assist with mitigating the impacts from the war. Below is a summary of distributions.

2024 CONU Distributions	
Primary Purpose	Amount
Myrgorod refugee relief	\$36,000
Korotych Single Mothers and Children's Home	\$16,000
Kharkiv refugee relief	\$16,000
Lutsk refugee and emergency aid	\$14,000
Kam'yanets-Podil's'kyi refugee relief	\$10,000
EWTN Children Publications	\$3,000
Sumy refugee relief	\$5,100

Table 2. Summary of year 2024 distributions

CONU continues to be a reliable source for the operation of the Single Mothers Home, also known as the House of Hope. Here is a recent update and thank you note from Co-Director Sister Kamila Frydryszewska:

"Dear Friends from CONU...Thank you for always being close to us! Yesterday was Christmas. At 6:00 a.m. the shelling of Kharkiv and its surroundings began and two rockets hit the electricity and heating station near us. We all got scared because it had been quiet for quite some time. We were without light until almost the evening. However, we decided that we would not let the joy of Christmas be taken away from us. In the morning there was a Holy Mass and then the children set off to sing Christmas carols to the neighbors. They handed out small gifts. ... Then we had a candlelight dinner. We managed to cook it thanks to the generator 😊 ... there was really a lot of joy. It is a paradox - that during war everything is experienced somehow more deeply, more authentically, and relationships with people become closer and warmer. Children are joyful and full of energy, which they can infect everyone around them. We are sending you our childish joy.... We always pray for the people who make it possible for our House of Hope to function. We are extremely grateful to you and grateful to God for taking such tender care of us and providing everything we need, and often even more, so that we can share with the children of the village. We hug you tightly, tightly! May GOD bless you!!!"

Mark 9:36-37: Taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, "Whoever receives one like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me."



Figure 4. The staff, mothers, and children gather for a Christmas celebration at the House of Hope

The latest update from Sumy comes from Father Mykola Karpenko. On December 6th, he was celebrating as Saint Nikolas which is intended to be more religious than Santa Claus. They sang a patriotic Ukrainian song as a "blessing" for the soldiers fighting in the war. They also prepared and distributed packages to war victims and local residents in need. The packages were purchased with funding provided by CONU. During the holiday mass, Archbishop Mefodi publicly thanked CONU and American friends for the donation and support.



Figure 5. Saint Nicholas brings gifts and leads in celebratory songs

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Figure 6. Packages distributed in Sumy to those in need

Father Oleksandr Zelinskyi, Director of Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) in Ukraine, provided this note about the impacts of their children publications supported by CONU funding: *"We sincerely thank CONU ... for the financial support of the printing of the children's magazine "VODOGRAJ". The magazine Vodograj is the only magazine published under the patronage and for the needs of the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine, as well as for all Christian denominations who wish to pass on faith in God to their children. In 2024, 1300 copies were printed every month (except July and August). ... We distribute the magazine to Roman Catholic parishes by mail. There are also racks in some nearby parishes from which those who wish can take the magazine. Due to the presence in social networks and the state catalog, the magazine is ordered not only by Roman Catholics, but also by Orthodox and Greek Catholics from different regions of Ukraine. A good sign of hope and the sense of continuing work on the project is that in this difficult time, parents continue to care about the religious education of their children. Our children know this magazine well...More than 25% of children in Ukraine are deprived of the opportunity to fully study due to military operations and regular shelling from Russia. Even those who go to school cannot fully study during air raids: shelters, as a rule, are designed to accommodate all children, and not to organize the educational process there."*

The Knights of Columbus councils at Holy Apostles in Colorado Springs and Our Lady of the Pines in Black Forest greatly assisted in 2024 funding for these publications. Holy Apostles' council held a breakfast with proceeds specifically targeted for the religious education booklets. The results was \$2000! The Our Lady of the Pines council petitioned and passed a \$1200 budget item to make this a recurring donation.



Figure 7. The Knights at Holy Apostles provide check to VP Ken Rackers, President Romella Ryan, and Managing Director Greg Sullivan



Figure 8. Sampling of pages from the November 2024 edition

In Lutsk, Father Pavlo Chomiak leads a team, under the guidance of Bishop Vitaly Skomaovskii, to provide meals to war victims, refugees, handicapped children, and the poor in the Diocese of Lutsk. We received a special thank you at Christmas time: *"2000 years ago, the world did not hear the voice of a Child who cried and needed help. Therefore, we sincerely thank you that today you hear this cry of children and turn it into laughter and joy. Thanks to your open hearts, the little ones, in addition to missiles and explosions, hear the sounds of joy, and instead of the language of war, feel the language of love that you give. May Christmas fill you with warmth and blessings for your goodness, which you carry in your merciful deeds!"*



Figure 9. Christmas card from the Diocese of Lutsk

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In Myrgorod, Father Stanislav Tanatarov, aka Father Stan, continues to provide an amazing level of refugee relief. Prior to the outbreak of war, he built the church in Myrgorod as well as one in Konotop with funding support from CONU. He is well loved and respected. He has converted many people from Orthodox to Catholicism. Father Stan provides for many needs including spiritual support, food, supplies, and utilities and rent support. He makes it possible for many to continue to live in Ukraine. His most recent message to CONU is:

“Glory to Jesus Christ...This year is ending and soon there will be 3 years of war. Our lives are filled with very different feelings. Of course, there is a lot of pain, suffering, death, broken human lives. You have always been with us in this terrible time... thank you... We cannot imagine what our life would look like without your help... We ask you, if possible, to help us until the end of this year. There are many in need. You are in our hearts and in our prayers. With love and prayer, Stanislav”

In the Diocese of Kharkiv, Caritas-Spes (Charity-Hope in Latin) has intense challenges being near the front lines

and only 20-30 kilometers from the Russian border. They recently have been providing 5000-8000 food or meal packages per week, as well as hygiene items. The kitchen on the Cathedral grounds provides hot soup for visitors from the city; limited access to emergency medical care and counseling. They also provide medical supplies. Father Wojciech, director of Caritas-Spes in the Diocese of Kharkiv sends this note of appreciation:

“We would like to say a big Thank you for your continued support. As we all know, “Charity is the act of giving help to those in need of it. It is a humanitarian act. It involves giving money, goods or time and effort to those who need it.” you and people around you are the perfect example. Your help has a long-term impact in reducing the cost on our daily activities, support for vulnerable peoples especially children and the new Social Welfare Center.

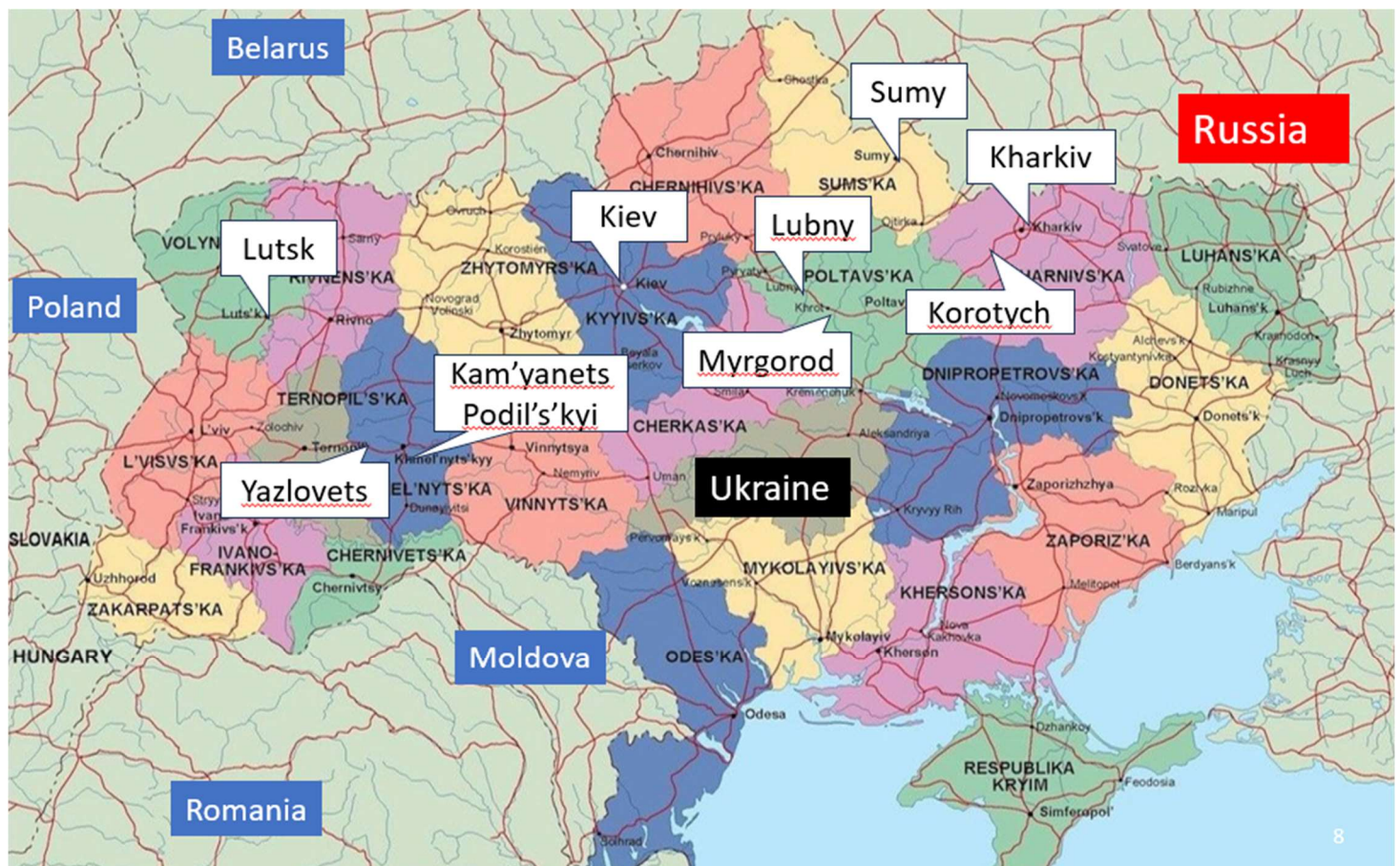


Figure 10. Where CONU helps our Ukrainian neighbors

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About CONU

Our Mission: To develop a partnership of prayer and action with and for each other in both our nations, allowing ourselves to share both in giving and receiving the many gifts God has given us, experiencing a greater depth of our human dignity in the one Body of Christ.

Our History: Since 1995 we have brought help to orphanages and rehabilitation centers in Kharkiv; have financially helped in teaching the blind community in Kharkiv, the Vincentian Depaul Center in Kharkiv; have helped renovate several churches in Ukraine, among them: Sumy, Romny, Rehalsk, Shotska, Oleysk, Korasten and have funded new building of churches in Konotop and Myrgorod. In addition, we have funded hospital patient needs, and a soup kitchen in Sumy. CONU was stood up as a 501(c)(3) organization in 2000.

Our Current Focus: To help keep safe the Ukrainian people in three of our dioceses that have been in the center of the madness. Recently, significant funding is being prioritized to assist refugees who need protection as well as for the care of war victims placed in harm's way. Due to the extent and duration of the impact from these terrible times, our ability to provide continued support to these efforts is in dire need. This also has forced delays and impacts on our foundational missions.

Our Leadership: We were blessed to be under the spiritual guidance and direction of Father Paul Wicker for over 15 years and are delighted to announce his role to be passed to Father Tom Jamka. CONU operates under an all-volunteer Board of Directors and 100% of all donations and gifts go to CONU designated recipients and projects.

More Info: To learn more about the CONU missions, projects, volunteers, happenings, and events, or to assist with our support to our Ukrainian brothers, please visit <https://conuhome.org> or <https://www.facebook.com/CONUOrg/> or email greg.sullivan@conuhome.org

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