

UKRAINE—THE STRENGTH OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT

By Karen Lesiak, Digitizing Partner, Hartford, Connecticut

As the tragic war in Ukraine continues to wage on, it is hard to fathom an entire country and its inhabitants being forced to flee their beloved homes, with so many men, women and, most devastatingly, children being displaced or losing their lives in a battle for freedom. In its midst, I was spurred on to find out more about Ukraine's history and its people, seeking a journalist's point of view and description of a country that was based on newspaper reporting over many decades. What I found was that Ukrainians are a resilient people in a country rich and vibrant in history and culture. A good place to start on this quest for information was by searching the CRRA Catholic News Archive, thecatholicnewsarchive.org.

Searching the Catholic News Archive

I started by typing "Ukraine" in the search field. This broad inquiry produces more than one thousand results covering many topics, most prominently, Ukraine's persecution and oppression, the centuries-old schism, and its art and cultural traditions.

Local articles reflecting personal and community stories of interest were also evident. For example, "Christian Ethics Course to be Developed by Churches for Public Schools in Ukraine" (*Clarion Herald*, July 13, 2005), and an account of Felician sister Jean Morozowich, who gained inspiration while teaching English at a summer school in Ukraine ("Trip to Ukraine Inspires a Nun," *Pittsburgh Catholic*, August 20, 2010).

Regarding persecutions, articles surfaced such as the one describing the victimization of priests and bishops, with many having been killed by the communists ("Determination to Stamp out Church Matched by Resistance of the Ukraine Catholics," *NCWC News Service*, January 11, 1950). Another article's headlines read, "Religion in Ukraine Wiped Out by Khrushchev, Committee Told," featured in *Hartford's Catholic*

Transcript, October 15, 1959. These were just a few examples from a much broader scope of content available.

I narrowed the initial search to come up with a cohesive CRRA column with important and interesting components. Each search gave me new ideas and connected me to different aspects of a courageous, steadfast, and spirited culture, revealing some key figures in the country's continuing battle for freedom amidst famine, religious persecution, and oppression.

While browsing 331 results for "Ukraine history," I came across an article in the Catholic News Service—News Feeds, about the man-made famine in 1932-33, which the author called "a reminder of severe injustices suffered over decades..." in a march by Ukrainian Americans to the Washington Monument that ended at the Soviet Embassy. Four United States clergy fasted and prayed in a week-long remembrance attended by President Ronald Reagan ("Thousands March to Mark 1933 Famine in Ukraine," *NC News Service*, October 4, 1983).

A new search, "Ukraine famine," resulted in 65 items. Among these was an explanation of the famine in the Catholic Worker that presented background on the genocide of Ukrainians from the man-made famine as referred to in the previous article. It occurred among the peasantry when food stocks were confiscated, including crops, seed stocks, and livestock from independent farmers, to support exportation of grain, ultimately starving and ravaging the people of their livelihood. Seven million people died in the terrorist upheaval during the reign of Stalin ("Famine 33: A Tragedy Kept in Silence," *The Catholic Worker*, June 1, 1994).

Beginnings of Christianity and History of Schism

To learn more about the beginnings of Christianity in Ukraine, I searched "Ukraine Catholic history" and came up with 260 hits, with some articles referring to the Schism with Rome. I searched "Ukraine schism" which resulted in a more focused and manageable sixty records.

A recounting of the Schism, reported in the *Saint Louis Register*, revealed that Ukrainian Catholics were brought into Christianity by Prince (Saint) Vladimir the Great, the Byzantine Patriarch in 988, who was in union with Rome and had been converted to Christianity by his own mother, Princess (Saint) Olga of Kiev. Two hundred years after the 1054 schism, a formal break occurred with the establishment of the Russian Orthodox Church. With the 1439 reunification of the Byzantine church with Rome at the Council of Florence, Russia assumed the role of center of Orthodoxy, although the unity between Russia and the church of Rome remained the same. Many priests and bishops of the regions of Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus, known then as Belorussia or White Russia, were martyred.

Hostilities toward Catholicism continued through the centuries and in 1705, the emperor Peter the Great murdered a priest with his own hands. Later, during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Catherine II began a systematic destruction of Catholic religious orders ("U.S. Ukrainian Bishops Reject News of Schism," *Saint Louis Register*, March 29, 1946).

Ukrainian Art and Customs

A search of "Ukraine art" and "Ukraine customs" yielded 139 and 35 hits respectively, providing a background on the artistry and creative culture of Ukrainians. According to an article in the *St. Louis Register*, the icon is the oldest and most sacred art form of Ukraine, dating back to the fifth and

sixth centuries. There has always been a great love and devotion to Mary by the Eastern Churches, and she is depicted frequently in this art form. It is not the visual effect, but the depth of faith one enters into through the icon that takes it beyond the physical and temporal world ("Eastern Church Loves Mary," *St. Louis Register*, January 11, 1952).

The icon is also a principal feature of the Eastern Churches, which depict "the eyes into heaven," as explained by Father Mezzomo, a diocesan and communication director and priest in Clifton, New Jersey. Mezzomo explained, "We see the saints not as they looked in life, as western art shows them, but as they are now in God's glory" ("Ukrainians Preserve Byzantine Traditions" by Denise Stankovics, *The Catholic Transcript*, December 8, 1978)

Ukrainians are also known for their love of music and dancing, cross stitch folk art, wood carving, and Easter egg painting. The art of designing exquisitely embroidered Ukrainian eggs dates back to the early centuries and is a connection to the Risen Lord ("Embroidered Eggs: Treasured Easter Symbols," *The Monitor*, April 4, 1958).

The articles relate how the Ukrainian people in the United States aim to keep their traditions alive during the Christmas season. The Ukrainian celebration of Christmas begins on January 7, in accordance with the Julian calendar, though its preparation precedes that, beginning on November 28. The celebration lasts until January 9, the Feast of Saint Stephen. On Saint Nicholas' Day, December 19th, the "good saint" puts presents under the children's pillows, with twigs for naughty children. On Christmas Eve, a local priest blesses a bread known as phosphora, which is served at home with a meatless array of twelve dishes, symbolizing the twelve apostles. Celebrations continue, honoring various feast days, with the Christmas season ending on the Feast of the Baptism

of Jesus on January 18 ("The Ukrainian Christmas begins on Jan. 6," *The Catholic Advocate*, December 22, 1960).

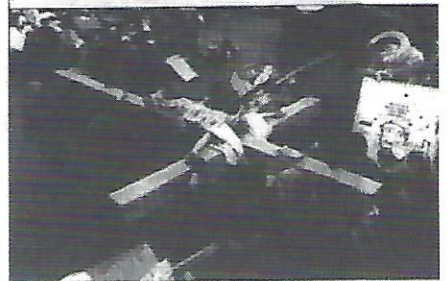
Early Ukrainian Immigration to the United States and Refugee Assistance Efforts

Various searches referenced below uncovered additional information. For instance, during the persecution of Ukrainian Catholics, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Diocese in the United States appealed to Bishop Senyshyn to ask the government to assist refugee priests, allow them to be accepted into dioceses, and to protect them from returning to Ukraine to face imprisonment and death at the hands of Soviet captors ("Greek Rite Catholics Desire 250 Refugee Clergy to Come to U.S.," *St. Louis Register*, December 14, 1945).

After World War II, amidst the communist regime, many displaced Ukrainians fled to the United States, leading to the third wave of Ukrainian immigration with the Displaced Persons Act of 1948. The Act allowed significant entry until 1952, when new restrictions on immigration were imposed.

In 1952, despite new restrictions, an act of "generous charity" by the United States Bishops Catholic Committee for Refugees and the Bureau of Immigration NCWC, and NCWC War Relief Services, allowed for hundreds of priests, orphans, and over 40,000 displaced persons of the Byzantine Rite to resettle in forty-nine American dioceses across twenty-three states, increasing the clergy in the Ukrainian Catholic Exarchate to more than 300. This led to the expansion of and the addition to the number of parishes. Twelve missionary posts were also established ("Byzantine Rite Bishop Makes Plea for Help to Hierarchy of U.S.," *St. Louis Register*, November, 28, 1952).

Carrying a cross in Ukraine



CNS PHOTO/YANNIS BEHRAKIS/ REUTERS
Mourners carry a large wooden crucifix past a barricade during a memorial procession in Independence Square in Kiev, Ukraine, Feb. 25. Dozens of protesters have been killed since November.

Pittsburgh Catholic, Friday, March 7, 2014, page 3 Briefs.

Ukrainian Faith and Courage under Soviet Suppression and Genocide Observed

In a 1949 *Catholic Standard and Times* article, Dr. Friedrich Funder depicts the Church, under Soviet rule, existing in "...20th century catacombs: old barns and mountain recesses in the Carpathian wilds." During this time, the Catholic Byzantine and Latin Church were banned, but Ukrainian people persisted in the practice of their faith. Priests were not allowed to celebrate Mass or attend to pastoral duties, so they practiced while disguised as working men in the fields or factory, secretly arranging meetings of the faithful. Soviet police, spies, and agents were everywhere ("Catholics in Communist Ukraine Cling Heroically to their Faith," *Catholic Standard and Times*, September 23, 1949).

In a *St. Louis Register* article, D. R. Brunst described continuing persecutions in a war against the Ukrainian church as "... unparalleled in modern history, perhaps in all history." He advocated for a "National Day of Prayer" on December 30, 1951, to commemorate the plight of the clergy and laity who were driven into exile, imprisoned, and in concentration camps, many dying as martyrs. According to

Brunst, the Day of Prayer would afford Catholics an opportunity to unite with spiritual weapons to assist fellow members of the Mystical Body ("Day of Prayer is Necessitated by Unparalleled War on Church" by D. R. Brunst. *Saint Louis Register*, December 21, 1951).

In 1955, an article reported that the Ukrainian Catholic Press had petitioned Congress to begin an inquiry into the religious persecution in Ukraine, and to hear witnesses. The article reveals that eighty percent of the churches in Ukraine had been destroyed and ten Catholic Bishops had been killed. Priests and monks who did not acknowledge the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church were sent to slave labor camps ("Ukrainians Charge Awful Persecution," *St. Louis Register*, November 25, 1955).

On July 1, 1959, Congress established an annual observance to bring attention to persecuted nations including Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, Latvia, Estonia, Romania, and other peoples and nations that had been enslaved (Cardinal Kroll, NCWC—News Feeds, July 18, 1969). During Captive Nations Week (July 12-19, 1970), programs across the United States included an Eastern Rite Mass celebrated at St. Patrick's Cathedral with Bishop Joseph Schmondiuk of the Ukrainian Catholic Diocese of Stamford (Connecticut) as celebrant and with Terence Cardinal Cooke, Archbishop of New York presiding. Father Raymond de Jaegher, a missionary for twenty years in China, who had been imprisoned by the communists, delivered a sermon warning about the dangers of communism as a "...systematic destruction from within of the United States and the Catholic Church." At the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, a sermon was given on "the nature of political and spiritual freedom." Following these services "...1,000 supporters marched up 5th Avenue to the bandshell in Central Park." On July 19, participants gathered at a rally

at the Statue of Liberty ("Captive Nations Week Marked by Masses, other U.S. Events." *The Catholic Transcript*, July 17, 1970).

In March 2001, marking the tenth anniversary of Ukrainian independence, Rotary Clubs and the Caritas Foundation organized efforts to send funds and computers to impoverished Ukraine ("Group Collects Computers for Ukraine: Kobzar Society aiding Impoverished European Nation, by Patricia Bartos," *Pittsburgh Catholic*, March 30, 2001).

A Papal Focus on Ukraine

Pope John XXIII announced the release of Cardinal Slipyi, an exiled bishop of Lviv, and the sole surviving Ukrainian Bishops, after his release was confirmed by Moscow in February 1963. Cardinal Slipyi reunited with the Pope in Rome, at which time a prayer of Thanksgiving was offered for his release. The Pope regarded Slipyi's release and subsequent meeting with him a "mysterious design which God calls all men to cooperate, gathering the threads of a cloth which is woven with his grace..." ("Archbishop Slipyi Freed; Reunited with Pope John," *The Catholic Advocate*, February 7, 1963).

Slipyi had been known as a "controversial churchman." He spent eighteen years in communist prisons and was even condemned to death, and despite his reunification with the Pope at the time of his release, he had a controversial association with Vatican City for the following nine years ("Ukrainians Rally around Bishop-exile by Robert L. Johnston," *The Catholic Transcript*, June 15, 1973).

In 1981, in a newsletter report "Aid to the Suffering Church," Slipyi wrote, "The Catholic church is thriving in Ukraine and other parts of the Soviet Union, despite its persecution by the communist government." He further clarified that about four million Catholics had kept their allegiance to the Vatican, including priests, monks,

sisters, numerous vocations, a clandestine hierarchy, and tens of thousands of lay people. Slipyi wrote, "The atheistic system has not been able to destroy the faith" ("Catholic Church Thrives in Ukraine says Cardinal Slipyi," by Nancy Fraser, NC New Service, April 2, 1981).

In other supporting events, Pope John Paul II, despite backlash from the Russian Orthodox Church, made his first trip to Ukraine during the week of June 23-27, 2001. In Lviv, the Pope explained to the Ukrainian people that he was not there "to steal their faithful but to overcome animosity... by bringing them together to 'transform society.'" The Pope further expressed, "The most fervent wish that rises from my heart is that the errors of times past will not be repeated in the future" (Pope in Ukraine: "Transform Society," *Pittsburgh Catholic*, June 29, 2001).

While in Kiev, the Pope visited an icon of a "miraculous" image of Our Lady of Zavaniza at the Church of Saint Nicholas. The Pope recited the Angelus after an outdoor Mass, and many Ukrainians were "struck" by his deep Marian devotion ("Unscheduled Stop at Marian Icon Strikes a Chord among Ukrainians," *Pittsburgh Catholic*, June 29, 2001).

Patricia Bartos, senior staff writer for the *Pittsburgh Catholic* reported on the Pittsburgh Alliance of Ukrainian Organizations and their excitement about a planned papal visit by John Paul II to the United States to acknowledge the independence of Ukraine. The Alliance's chairman emphasized the importance of the visit to strengthen relations between the Byzantine Ukrainian Catholics and Rome, which reflected local support for the Ukrainian Catholics in the United States ("Ukrainian Community Upbeat about Upcoming Papal Trip," by Patricia Bartos, *Pittsburgh Catholic*, June 22, 2001).

In March 2014, Pope Francis called for prayer and fasting with the help of the Holy Spirit when peaceful

demonstrations in Ukraine turned violent, and innocent lives were lost with the presence of Russian troops in the Crimea ("Bishop Zubick on Crisis in Ukraine," *Pittsburgh Catholic*, March 7, 2014). Again in 2016, Pope Francis made pleas for humanitarian aid, designating a special collection on Divine Mercy Sunday and prayed that it "could help to promote peace... in that harshly tried land" ("Pope Reminds World of Suffering in War Torn Ukraine," *Pittsburgh Catholic*, April 29, 2016).

The Tragedy of War and a Resilient People

The great tragedy of war has taken a toll on the men, women and most devastatingly, the children of Ukraine. Through journalistic viewpoints, we begin to piece together in authenticity the nature of their struggle and its beginnings, and the perseverance of the resilient Ukrainian people. Journalists give us essential sources that are distinguishable from other forms of information. From those who write the history of our nations and current events of our times, we are able to be witnesses to that which aims to speak the truth. ■

Search Terms and Results

- Ukraine (1,171)
- Ukraine history (331)
- Ukraine famine (65)
- Ukraine Catholic History (260)
- Byzantine Rite (3,145)
- Ukrainian Catholics (1,526)
- Ukrainian Rite Catholics (834)
- Ukraine Art (139)
- Ukraine customs (35)
- Cardinal Slipyi (393)
- Ukraine persecution (355)
- Communist Ukraine (448)
- Ukrainian slave camps (20)
- Ukrainian slave labor (29)
- Pope in Ukraine (100)
- Ukrainian immigration (79) ■

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Pope in Ukraine: 'Transform society'

By N
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Lviv, Ukraine — With respect for Ukraine's Orthodox majority and relatives to the nation's people who endured decades of war and repression, Pope John Paul II visited the East European nation June 23 through 27.

The 81-year-old pope assured the Orthodox he did not want to steal their faithful but to overcome animosity and move forward together to transform the society.

"I have not come here with the intention of proselytizing, but to bear witness to Christ together with all Christians," the pope said in his arrival speech.

In his speeches and in his visits to the mass graves of the victims of the Soviets and the Nazis, the pope paid homage to the suffering of the Ukrainian people.

Pope John Paul told the people "I have long awaited this visit and have prayed fervently that it might take place."

Joseph Navarro Valls, the pope's spokesman, told reporters June 24 "The pope is living a dream. He has dreamed of this for many years, and now he is living it."

"This man who has traveled all over the world," he said, has longed to visit the world's main Orthodox nations, and over



Children of Ukraine surrounded Pope John Paul II and President Leonid Kuchma at the Kiev airport upon the pope's arrival June 23.

The pope celebrated Mass on muddy racetrack grounds in Lviv June 26, headlining two well-loved local pastors, Archbishop Jozef Bilczewski, who headed the Lviv Archdiocese until his death in 1923, and Father Zygmunt Gononowski, a priest who spent his life helping the poor and sick.

Later that evening, meeting with several hundred thousand youths in a damp ruin in a Lviv suburb, the pope stood

under a canopy and joked, "Let the children will grow!" He sang two Polish folk songs, one about the rain going away and — after having changed his wet white robes toward the end of the service — the other about a peasant who wants to go home because his feet are tired.

In Lviv, the pope congratulated Ukrainians on the 100th anniversary of the end of communist persecution in 1991. Marian devotion is flourishing again in Ukraine. It made the 81-year-old Polish pontiff, who has a lifelong spiritual attachment to Mary, feel almost at home.

Reciting the Angelus after an outdoor Mass June 24, the pope said Mary's "protection" had accompanied every step of the Christian community of Ukraine ever since the baptism of Rus in 988. Behind him on the altar stood a gold gilt icon of Mary and Jesus.

Vatican officials said that, through Mary, the pope had found an emotional way to connect with Ukrainian Christians that transcended inter-church squabbles over property or territory.

"The polls have revealed an interesting and hopeful detail. Many Ukrainians have been struck by the pope's love for the Mother of God," the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano*, wrote just before the pope's trip.

See POPE on page 3

Diocese working to meet needs of growing Hispanic population

By CHUCK MOODY
Staff Writer

The Diocese Department for Religious Education/CED is reaching out to Hispanics who are settling in the Pittsburgh area and many of whom are seeking instruction in the Catholic faith.

Judy Kirk, director of the department, first met about a year ago with representatives of the Catholic Hispanic community.

This group included Fr. Francis Joseph Studwell of the St. Anthony Priory in Ben Avon, who is known as "Father Jim" and serves as the "pastor" to the community.

"My role in this was to see how we could help them in their catechetical endeavor. How can we catechize their group — their children and their adults," Kirk said.

She immediately was put in touch with Clementina Assand, a member of the Hispanic community and the originally is from Peru.

"She's a delight," said Kirk of Assand. "She has such enthusiasm and desire to pull all of this together. She has a master's degree in religious education which is to our benefit because it ties right in with our policy that in order to be a minister catechists you need to have the degree. And in order to help with this process we're going to need somebody who really has the qualifications. She really fits in well."

There are many Hispanics in the Oakland area of Pittsburgh. They include professionals who are well established, students who are studying mostly at colleges and universities and Mexican service workers.

The Hispanic community describes itself as multi-cultural because the people come from many different countries. Small settlements of Hispanics and Latinos also have been identified in Aspinwall, Coraopolis and Monroeville in addition to Canshanburg.

"It's a very diverse group of Hispanic people," Kirk said. "A large portion of the Hispanic community does not speak English well or at all. Their lack

of speaking English and their desire to preserve their culture are what brings them together as a worshipping community.

Father Studwell has provided pastoral leadership, and Assand has been working with the Department for Religious Education/CED to set up and provide certification for catechists of Hispanic children and adults.

The Hispanic community worships at 1 p.m. every Sunday at St. Hyacinth Church which is part of St. Regis Parish in Oakland, and use of classroom space for the religious instruction of adults and children has been obtained through Father Donald Fisher, pastor.

Attendance at the Easter Sunday liturgy was more than 300, and there has been a growing desire among adults and children for instruction in the reception of the sacraments.

Father Kim has instructed about 500 of the community in the sacraments — reconciliation, Eucharist and confirmation — and some of them have received the sacraments," Kirk said. "And also Clementina has helped with those sacraments."

"(They're feeling very much a part of the diocese already, which is what you want to happen.)"

— Judy Kirk

Unscheduled stop at Marian icon strikes a chord among Ukrainians



Pope John Paul II prays before an image of Our Lady of Zarvanytsia at the Church of St. Nicholas in Kiev.

KIEV, Ukraine (APNS) — The first stop on Pope John Paul II's long-awaited trip to Ukraine — a prayer visit to an icon of Mary — wasn't on the official program, but it struck a chord among Ukrainian Catholics and Orthodox alike.

The pope pulled his motorcade over at the edge of a Kiev park June 23 and walked into the small Church of St. Nicholas, a former recital hall under communism, to meditate before a "miraculous" image of Our Lady of Zarvanytsia.

Tradition holds that the icon was found by a Ukrainian monk fleeing persecution in the 13th century, after he fled asleep next to a stream and had a dream about Mary. He eventually built a shrine to her on the spot, and it draws thousands of pilgrims today, many seeking physical healing.

"Holy Mother of God, spread your maternal mantle over all Christians," the pope murmured as he knelt before the gold-framed paint icon. He dedicated his entire visit to Mary — a point he announced at nearly every one of his stops in Ukraine.

Pittsburgh Catholic (1957-2016)

Recently, almost 59 years of the *Pittsburgh Catholic* (1957-2016) were digitized and added to the Catholic News Archive. If you are interested in having your run of newspapers or eligible publications become part of CRRA's digital database, contact CRRA for more information: CatholicResearch.org.

CRRA is happy to announce that the Catholic News Archive, a Veridian collection, was selected by ACRL *Choice Reviews* as one of its outstanding academic titles of 2021. It was one of only 11 electronic resources included in a total of 440 titles, the majority being book titles. It is also now searchable through JSTOR. ■