

# UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN THE DRAMA OF WAR

LIVE WEBINAR FROM LVIV ON 12 MAY 2022

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European Committee for Catholic Education

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INTERNATIONAL OFFICE OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION  
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Event co-organised by the European Committee for Catholic Education (CEEC) and the Office International de l'Enseignement Catholique (OIEC), with the support of the Commission of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church for Education

# Introduction

24 February 2022: Russia declared war on Ukraine and invaded the country. No less than 3 months later, the country is still at war. But what is the situation in Ukrainian Catholic schools today? What are the urgent needs of schools and religious communities? To what extent can we, as stakeholders and representatives of Catholic schools in Europe, support our Ukrainian counterparts?

These and other questions were addressed in a live webinar from Lviv on 12 May 2022 co-organised by representatives of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church Commission for Education, the European Committee for Catholic Education (CEEC) and the International Office of Catholic Education (OIEC).

This event, moderated by Philippe Richard (OIEC) and Guy Selderslagh (CEEC), gave the floor to several players and representatives of the Catholic school in Ukraine:

- Father Petro Mayba, head of the Education Commission of the Greek Catholic Church of Ukraine
- Sister Khrystophora Bushtyn, member of the Public Council of Churches and Religious Organisations at the Ministry of Education of Ukraine
- Olya Riy, Headteacher of St Sofia's School in Lviv
- Halyna Tuziak, Headteacher of St Nicholas Nursery School in Lviv

This file contains their contributions



# Education in Ukraine through the prism of war



*Contribution of Father Petro Maiba,  
Head of the Commission of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic  
Church for the Education*

Russia will never accept the fall of the Berlin Wall nor the collapse of the USSR. Putin has made it clear that he disagreed with the outcome of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the loss of eastern territories.

The Russian communist regime has always lived at the expense of other people whom it has seized and held by force, forcing them to give their earnings to the Moscow treasury, be subject to the Kremlin's economic policies, and be dependent on energy to dictate conditions.

That is why Russia has always sought revenge and wanted to rebuild a totalitarian empire in many countries of the former Soviet Union that chose the path of democracy and the free market.

Ukraine has also clearly reaffirmed its democratic aspirations during the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity.

Ukraine reaffirmed its commitment to dignity and human rights, held 7 presidential elections, and replaced 6 presidents. In each parliamentary election, the parliament changed by a third. The international community has recognized these elections as free and democratic.

However, this process was not easy and had some problems:

- Oligarchization of the political and economic process
- Corruption - in particular judicial.

But the last revolution of dignity rebelled against these problems. Ukraine has thus completely distanced itself from the totalitarian post-Soviet legacy. Association Agreement with the EU, visa-free regime - are all evidence of Ukraine's success. Therefore, Putin could not wait any longer. Fearing Ukraine as an independent democratic society and losing influence, including political and economic, he started a full-scale war. As you understand, Putin and Russia are fighting to either eliminate Ukraine in principle or return Ukraine to its political-economical, geopolitical sphere of influence. The worst is that it wants to take Ukraine back to its system of values where there is no freedom and human dignity, free democratic and political choices. Where all decisions are made by the king and his retinue.

We are fighting for a God-given life, for our dignity, our rights, our freedoms, our families, and our right to determine our way of life, both political and economic.

The war will end sooner or later. We will have to rebuild cities and infrastructures. But the most important thing is to build a new vision of Ukraine, a new social contract. To this end, Catholic social doctrine can make its free contribution through the education and enlightenment of our citizens. That is why Ukraine needs to support Catholic schooling and education. During the war, many entrepreneurs lost their income. Therefore, education, especially private, will suffer.

It is very necessary to strengthen the institutional capacity of our schools and to contribute to the formation of a new value-oriented vision based on the Christian Principles of the new generation of Ukrainians.

It is necessary to form teachers and change the educational processes in educational institutions that will bring up a new generation, with a new vision and a new consciousness, as has happened in the past with many countries in Europe and the world.

# Catholic schools before the war and the challenge of the war



*Contribution of Sister Khrystofora Bushtyn,  
Member of the Public Council of Churches and Religious  
Organisations at the Ministry of Education of Ukraine*

## Context

When Ukraine gained independence, the right to religious education was not immediately secured by any legal document. Thus, for more than twenty years, the religious communities of Ukraine have been looking for various organizational forms to launch and operate their educational initiatives. Democratization of education has not been so rapid in Ukraine. Among other important issues, the content of school curricula was regulated by the ministry and could not officially contain elements other than the atheistic worldview. Due to public interest, changes in the worldview of the state, and the reform of the education system, the issue of including spiritual and ethical courses in the school curriculum has become increasingly acute. In 2005, the order of the President of Ukraine №1-1\657 on the improvement of moral education was signed. To implement this, a commission was set up to develop the content of new training courses. Educational and methodological developments for these subjects were carried out by educational specialists in cooperation with representatives of churches and religious associations based on the existing previous experience of individual regions.

## The right to religious education

The right to religious education emerged only ten years later. On June 2, 2015, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted the Law on Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Concerning the Right of Religious Organizations to Establish Educational Institutions. These modifications to the laws formed the basis of the new law of Ukraine "On General Secondary Education" in 2020. For the first time, in the history of modern Ukraine, the paragraph 6 of Article 1 states that the founder of secondary education institution can also be a religious organization.

At the same time, the right is also ensured that these institutions "have the right to determine their religious orientation in their educational activities." This right was later confirmed by other laws and bylaws.

Therefore, churches and religious communities faced the opportunity and at the same time the challenge of establishing their own educational institutions and developing their own religious program. The first program "Worldview. Faith. Virtues" was established in the UGCC Commission on Education for Catholics in Ukraine in 2021. This year we hoped to introduce it as an experiment to Catholic schools.

The war interrupted this process. We would like to continue introducing this subject in the resumed (after the war) activities of our schools. Although the number of Catholic schools is very small compared to other schools in Ukraine, our schools are always seen as signs of hope and freedom in Ukraine. In general, it should be noted that schools of Christian denominations or other religious communities in Ukraine do not account for a significant share. This is such a small part of schools. In fact, together with private schools it barely reaches 1% of all schools in Ukraine due to the lack of a favourable environment to develop these schools beforehand. Since 2020, the financial and legal context has become more favourable... but an absurd war has come to us.

### War

The war interrupted the activities of existing schools and the development of several new schools, which were hopefully established in the Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic communities of Ukraine in various parts of the country. Since the beginning of the war, 46 schools, 30 kindergartens, and other buildings have been damaged in Kyiv. Such buildings were destroyed in the cities where active combats took place (for example, Kharkiv and others). Here in Kyiv, we have made a lot of efforts and for the second year, we are working on the creation of a Catholic school. Along with us, two other Roman Catholic communities established their primary schools. With the conflict, 75% of our children and their mothers left Ukraine from the very beginning of the war. We are grateful to our teachers who were able to start online communication with children almost immediately, and from the second week of the war online teaching.

This education is often overburdened by the fact that children are worried because somewhere in Ukraine their grandmother lives or their father works, where a rocket or a bomb landed yesterday or today, it worries children here and there. Our lessons are a special stabilizing moment for children. Our teachers must first communicate and find out how the children are feeling, and only then start teaching. We face challenges when we plan how to continue our activities from the new school year. Some institutions, such as ours, rent premises. Although there are arrangements for discounts, financial planning is difficult. Because of the war, the state reduced the percentage of funding for education...

Should we continue our educational initiative? If so, in what form? These questions and many other issues concern us not only because of financial challenges but also whether the children will return, and whether they will be able to continue to visit our institutions. We live by our questions and look for signs on how to proceed. Meeting you is a sign of encouragement for me.

#### And finally...

Let me thank you for your prayers and your attention to the tragic situation of the war against the Ukrainian people due to Russian aggression. Unfortunately, this war has already killed more than 2,500 civilians in Ukraine, including about 226 children killed and 415 wounded, many elderly people, women, and men... Countries of Europe and the world have warmly welcomed millions of refugees, women, and children, the elderly, who have been forced to flee their homes. Thank you for your effective mercy! Unfortunately, soldiers die in unequal struggles, defending their homeland. Numerous volunteers in Ukraine work tirelessly. Numerous social infrastructure facilities were destroyed, including schools in the east, south, and centre of Ukraine. There will be a lot more work... The Ukrainian people believe in the power of good. By defending themselves, my people show great mercy to the needy. We are encouraged by the great amount of help from many people of goodwill and the governments of different countries. Thank you for that! Glory to Ukraine!

I kindly ask you to pray and talk about the war so that it will end as soon as possible! Thank you for your support!!

# Life in a Catholic school in a war situation: a headteacher's testimony



*Contribution of Olga Riy*

*The head of the private Catholic school-gymnasium of St. Sophia, Lviv*

Christ has Risen,

My name is Olha Riy, I am the head of the private Catholic school-gymnasium of St. Sophia, located in the centre of Lviv on the premises of the Holy Intercession Monastery. Our school has been operating for 20 years, about 200 children from 0th to 10th grade are studying there. And we have about 80 employees.

The current school year has been a bit unsettling from the very beginning. After all, we often had called in our schools about the mining, when we were forced to evacuate children and wait for police checks to start lessons. My children and I learned to leave our classes and school quickly.

Literally speaking, in the last weeks before the war, we learned how to go to the shelters located in our institution and monastery. The Studite sisters and I also got acquainted with the basements and discovered how to bring them to such conditions that they will be comfortable for children and adults. An emergency worker came to us, inspected the premises, and gave recommendations for improvement (which still need to be done). But by no means did anyone expect to face a real war. The beginning of the war was a surprise for us. We, of course, did not take children to school on February 24. We allowed our employees and students to find the safest place for themselves under these conditions.

The workers had the opportunity to take care of their families, their children, the elderly in the family and create the safest possible conditions for themselves. We did not have 2 school days. Then the school was on forced holiday.

Since we have many employees who live outside of Lviv and spend a lot of time getting to work, they started volunteering at their place of residence. Some joined military networking centres, and prepared hot meals and pastries. Others helped sort out humanitarian aid, while some went abroad and have been working there until today in volunteer centres to help IDPs and military personnel with food, accommodation and medicine.

Our psychologist has joined the team of psychologists working at the Lviv railway station, where she helps children and adults. She has also regular meetings with our staff, students, and parents. Our teacher-organizer often participated in masterclasses for IDP children.

We also felt that our students needed help and a feeling that they were needed and important. During the forced holidays, our teachers held online meetings with their classes, where they prayed for our military, shared their concerns, drew pictures, and wrote letters to our defenders, which we sent to the front.

We also had live meetings with the children at school. They were related to the fact that we wanted the children to join the overall victory by doing something else with their own hands. Parents supported this initiative. We bought dried fruits and different kinds of nuts, and children with their teachers, and some with their parents came to school. All together we formed bags with nuts and dried fruits for the military. It was exciting for them. There was a girl whose father and relatives were at the forefront, so she made a box with delicacies for them, to give strength and energy to the native military during the fighting. Children who were forced to leave their homes and now live in our student families also joined us. Then we put those bags in big boxes, drew pictures and wrote letters of thanks to our defenders, and took them to the military who were planning to go to the front. We are planning such another meeting at school.

The financial issue was also a big challenge for our school, as we are a private institution that works thanks to parents' costs. But many of them have lost their source of income. Several children have already taken away the documents.

Also, there have been several meetings with parents who are asking for instalments and are planning to move to a public school. We provided a discount for parents for the last 3 months of training due to the absence of meals in school and were forced to reduce the salaries of administrative staff, technicians and kitchen staff.

So far, the salaries of teachers and educators have not suffered. We hope that they will not suffer later. We hope that we will resume our work and we very much hope that parents will be eager and able to find an opportunity to solve financial issues so that children can study with us.

Summer is coming, and the period of repairs and purchase of new equipment is approaching. So we also hope to make the best use of our resources for the maximum benefit of our children and employees.

Years before COVID, we managed to write projects that significantly helped us improve our learning resources. Unfortunately, no project has been submitted last year. We would be very grateful if this opportunity was restored, and if we could find organizations that can help develop the Catholic school in Lviv.

We understand that all resources must be directed to the defense of our country and victory now. Yet we understand that education is a good foundation for the formation of a conscious and strong Ukrainian. Therefore, I would very much like to feel the maximum support and provide our own, if we can.

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# Christian kindergartens work experience during the full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022.



*Contribution of Halyna Tuziak  
Head of the St Nicholas kindergarten, Lviv*

## Experience of:

- Garden of St. Nicholas
- Preschool of St. Sophia
- Preschoolers of St. Sophia School
- Svitlychka
- Syaivo
- Children of Light

## Our Activities:

- We collected aid for the military and the needy (clothing, stationery, funds)
- We prepared food for volunteers, unloaded and sorted humanitarian aid.
- The kindergarten has become a temporary home for workers who need a safe place to live.
- We helped volunteer kitchen: drying grapes and potatoes for the meals of the military at the forefront
- We made postcards for the military with children
- We did voluntary work (making nets, first aid kits, animation with children, working with refugees, baking cookies and rolls)
- For two or more months, some kindergartens hosted temporarily displaced persons, and established coexistence and management with them. Humanitarian aid, food, accommodation, and laundry were organized for them.

- Remote work with kindergarten children (zoom, video lessons)
- We received feedback from parents every Sunday (discussion: what did you like? What to change? How do children perceive the topic? Other organizational aspects, discussion of experiences, emotional state of children and parents, discussion of plans for the next week). After each meeting - a brief summary-prescribed protocol to familiarize those who could not join the meeting. (experience of the preparatory class-preschool age of the School of St. Sophia)
- We collected the "Easter basket" with the parents of the kindergarten and the inhabitants of the town for soldiers (Yavoriv)
- We organised joint evening prayer (Rosary) with parents, children, employees and all who wish (initiated by "Svitlychka")
- We organised online meetings with a psychologist (to support the emotional state of adults)
- We organised catechism of children and adults ("Syaivo")

#### Cooperation with organisations:

- Emmaus
- Newly created Volunteer Initiative "Children of the Country: Entertainment for Courage".
- Plast
- Regional and Lviv City Council (social department and education department)
- Lviv Philharmonic
- Schools that accept temporarily displaced persons
- Lviv Regional Library for Children

#### Difficulties encountered:

- Uncertainty, panic in the first 3 days, everyone went home to stay with family because no one understood if tomorrow we will be alive.
- Lack of pupils in private institutions is a loss of funds for wages, rent, and heating.

- The desire to help did not match the possibilities. Private kindergartens wanted to accept temporarily displaced persons in their institutions but had to abandon this idea because they could not pay for heat and rent, so they looked for other options.
- Fear - whether we will get paid, whether there will be something to live for.
- Some workers faced a difficult choice: to go abroad without a husband or to stay here in Ukraine.
- Not all institutions have bomb shelters
- Stress due to air sirens, explosions, and negative information.

#### Positive aspects:

- These challenges brought people together, as they have done many things together (helping refugees, joint prayers)
- Talking more about personal things (emotions, family situations) - we know more about each other
- Learned to overcome fear a little and see something good in everything. (new acquaintances, new skills, abilities)
- Revised our values and priorities ... analysed our life positions

#### Trying to live on and make plan:

- Organize joint meetings with children and parents (Easter parties, Mother's Day, retreats) - restoring the full life of the kindergarten community
- Psychological meetings with workers who are in a state of anxiety because their relatives are on the front line, in captivity
- Discussions on topics relevant to parents and children (on request)
- Camp for temporarily displaced families and children for 5 days (with departure)
- A series of daily camps for the integration of children (Lviv and temporarily displaced) - 7 days
- Baptism of IDP children (Yavoriv)

# HOW TO SUPPORT UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS?

To show your solidarity with the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic schools, please make a bank transfer with the mention "Solidarity Ukrainian Catholic Schools". The CEEC will give an accurate and open account of the use made of these funds.

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