



DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNICATIONS

Statement of solidarity from Bishop Robert Byrne on behalf of the Hexham and Newcastle Diocese and the local Roman Catholic community – Thursday 24th February 2022 – for immediate release

“At dawn today (24.2.22) the independent country of Ukraine was invaded by its larger neighbour, Russia. This is an unwarranted, unprecedented, and widespread military attack on a European country of 44 million people. The citizens of Ukraine will have expected to start their day, much as the rest of us would do – being free from fear, having a reassuring sense of what tomorrow might possibly bring. Our immediate thoughts and prayers are with all those, of whatever faith, that are affected by this catastrophic course of action.

I wholly echo today’s call from the Holy Father, Pope Francis, for immediate cessation of violence - and for peace and greater stability to return to the country as soon as possible. Earlier this month the Pope decried the ‘madness of war’ as tensions escalated in the region in recent weeks. In the New Year, The Holy Father asked that ‘we continue to beseech the Lord of Peace, so that the tensions and the threat of war will be overcome in favour of a serious dialogue.’

We pray here in Hexham and Newcastle that our government and other world leaders have the wisdom and strength of purpose to de-escalate this situation. We know from the Bible, and through the life and teachings of Christ, that might is rarely, ever right.

Pope Francis has asked that Ash Wednesday (2.3.22) is a day of solidarity with prayer and fasting in the hope of peace for the people of Ukraine. Please pray for the people of Ukraine during this Sunday’s Mass (27.2.22) and again on Ash Wednesday. Some of us may know the country well, or know Ukrainians who live in this country and in our Diocese. They will be very concerned for their own relatives and kinsmen at this time. I would ask that you express your own solidarity directly with them by taking up the Holy Father’s call, or in other ways you think appropriate in these grave times.

I had the opportunity very recently to meet with Bishop Kenneth Nowakowski, Eparchial Bishop of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in the United Kingdom and have already passed on the best wishes for a better future, and the prayerful intentions from our community to his. In the days and nights that pass in the next few weeks, I urge you to keep remembering those in Ukraine, who are innocent and only wish for what we have and enjoy. Let this thought also inform how we approach the whole Lenten period – thinking of others elsewhere in the world, who lack what we consider everyday amenities and opportunities. Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord.“

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(1) Cardinal Vincent Nichols, President of the Bishops' Conference, has called for an immediate cessation of the Russian attacks in Ukraine and for the protection of innocent civilians.

"I appeal for all to pray for the people of Ukraine, who are suffering the brunt of this conflict. I pray for their strength and perseverance under this onslaught.

"The international community must unite in seeking an end to this conflict through peaceful means, including dialogue and negotiation, as the only way forward.

"It is their responsibility to ensure that international law and territorial sovereignty are respected. We must also keep in mind the plight of those who will become refugees as a result of this attack and the humanitarian crisis that will inevitably follow.

"In this precarious moment for the people of Ukraine and further across Europe, I pray for the victims of this conflict and their families."