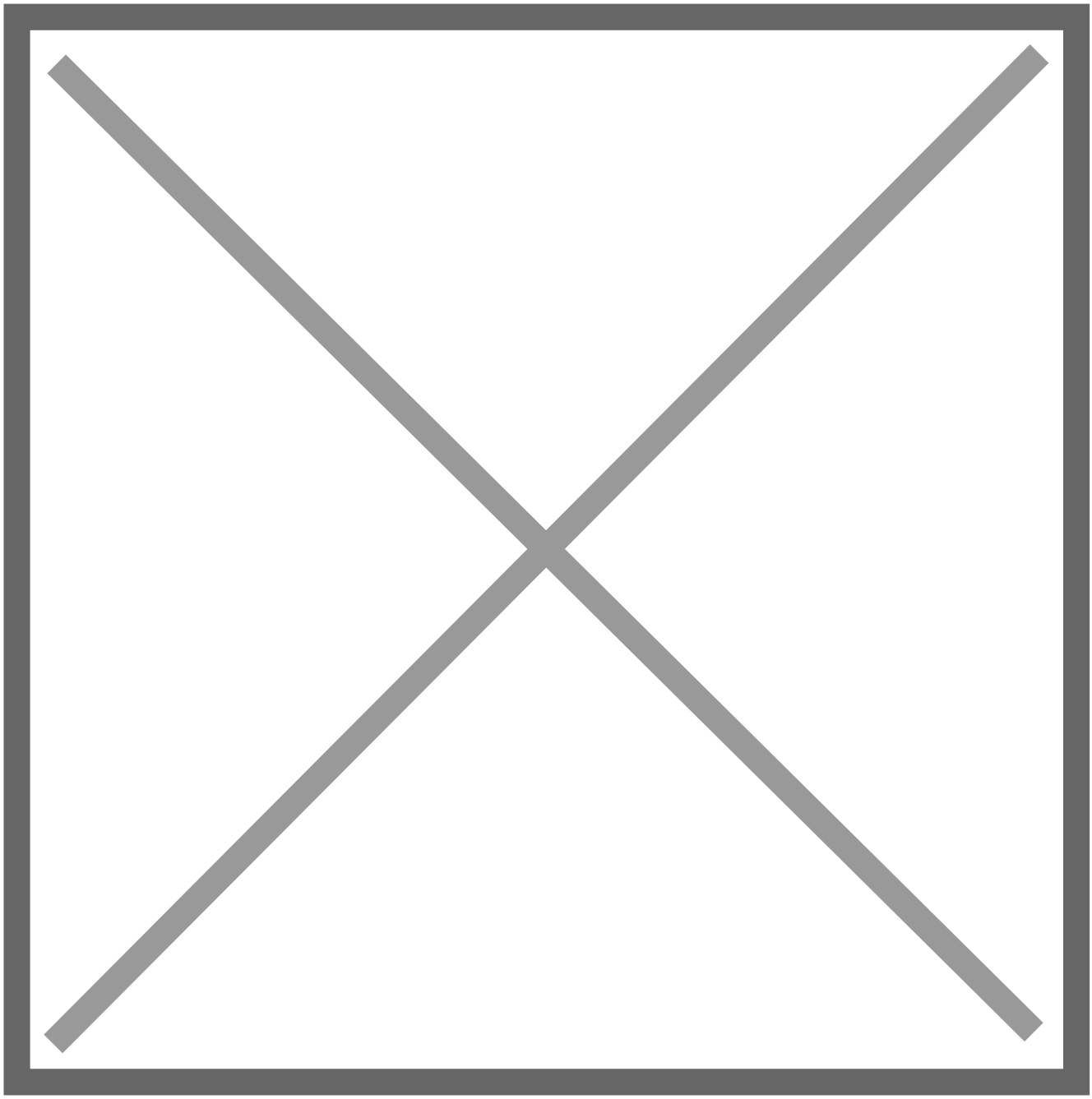
Vatican
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People gather outside Rome's Colosseum April 19, 2019, before Pope Francis leads the Way of the Cross. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

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Vatican City — April 12, 2022

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The head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church asked Pope Francis to scrap plans to have a Ukrainian woman and a Russian woman carry the cross together during the pope's Way of the Cross service at Rome's Colosseum April 15.

Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, major archbishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, said April 12, "I consider such an idea untimely, ambiguous and such that it does not take into account the context of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine."

For Eastern Catholics in Ukraine, he said, "the texts and gestures of the 13th station of this Way of the Cross are incoherent and even offensive, especially in the context of the expected second, even bloodier attack of Russian troops on our cities and villages."

The meditation for the 13th station, which the Vatican said was written by a Ukrainian family and a Russian family, speaks of "death everywhere" and asks, "Where are you, Lord? Where are you hiding? We want our life back as before. Why all of this? What wrong did we do? Why have you forsaken us? Why have you forsaken our peoples?"

But it also ponders "how difficult it will be to reconcile ourselves to all this. Lord, where are you? Speak to us amid the silence of death and division, and teach us to be peacemakers, brothers and sisters, and to rebuild what bombs tried to destroy."

Before Shevchuk issued his statement, Andrii Yurash, Ukraine's ambassador to the Holy See, had tweeted that his embassy "understands and shares the general

concern in Ukraine and many other communities" about the idea of bringing a Ukrainian and a Russian together to carry the cross at the service.

"Now we are working on the issue, trying to explain (the) difficulties of its realization and possible consequences," he tweeted.

The statement from Shevchuk's office said he, too, "conveyed to the Vatican the numerous negative reactions of many bishops, priests, monks and nuns, and laity who are convinced that gestures of reconciliation between our peoples will be possible only when the war is over and those guilty of crimes against humanity are justly condemned."

"I hope that my request, the request of the faithful of our church, the request of the faithful of the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine will be heard," the archbishop said.

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