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Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, meets Volodymyr Zelenskyy, president of Ukraine, during his visit to Ukraine July 23, 2024. (CNS/Volodymyr Zelenskyy via X)

Carol Glatz

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Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of State, visited Ukraine to hold high-level meetings, meet local Catholics and represent Pope Francis at the final stop of a pilgrimage to the Marian Shrine of Berdychiv.

"My presence in Ukraine (is) to bring in person the closeness of the pope," the cardinal said July 22 on the Secretariat of State's official X account.

The cardinal met with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky and other government officials in Kyiv July 23 and "reiterated the pope's closeness and commitment to find a just and lasting peace for martyred Ukraine," the secretariat said on X.

Zelenskyy said on his official X account July 23, "We discussed the consequences of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the ongoing aerial terror, the difficult humanitarian situation, and the outcomes of our meeting with Pope Francis in June in Italy."

"We focused particularly on the decisions of the first Peace Summit and the Vatican’s role in establishing a just and lasting peace for Ukraine. I am grateful for (the) Cardinal’s support of our country and people," the post said.

"I appreciate this significant gesture of support for Ukraine, the Ukrainian people, and our desire to live peacefully in our own state. It is essential for us and for the cause of peace that the Vatican remains active in protecting lives and supporting the implementation of the Peace Formula, particularly regarding the release of prisoners," Zelenskyy wrote on X July 23.

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Parolin's visit from July 19-24 included stops in Kyiv, Odesa, Berdychiv, and Lviv. On July 23 he visited the Okhmatdyt children's hospital in Kyiv, which still showed signs

of Russian bombing on July 8.

The cardinal visited the different wards that have been reopened and spoke with the young patients and their parents, the secretariat said on X July 23. He greeted and encouraged the medical staff and looked at drawings made by the children.

Parolin also visited Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, major archbishop of Kyiv-Halych and head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.

He went to the cathedral, which continues to function as a "refuge" for people during Russian airstrikes, said a press release from the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church July 23.

The cardinal "expressed his support and gratitude for the humanitarian missions of our church and he was pleasantly surprised by our progress," the press release said. The cardinal and archbishop also discussed the Vatican's efforts to free prisoners of war.

"It was emphasized the need to be able to visit prisoners of war, both military and civilian, who are illegally detained in Russia, bringing them food, needed clothes, and, especially religious literature, which they need for their spiritual life," the press release said.