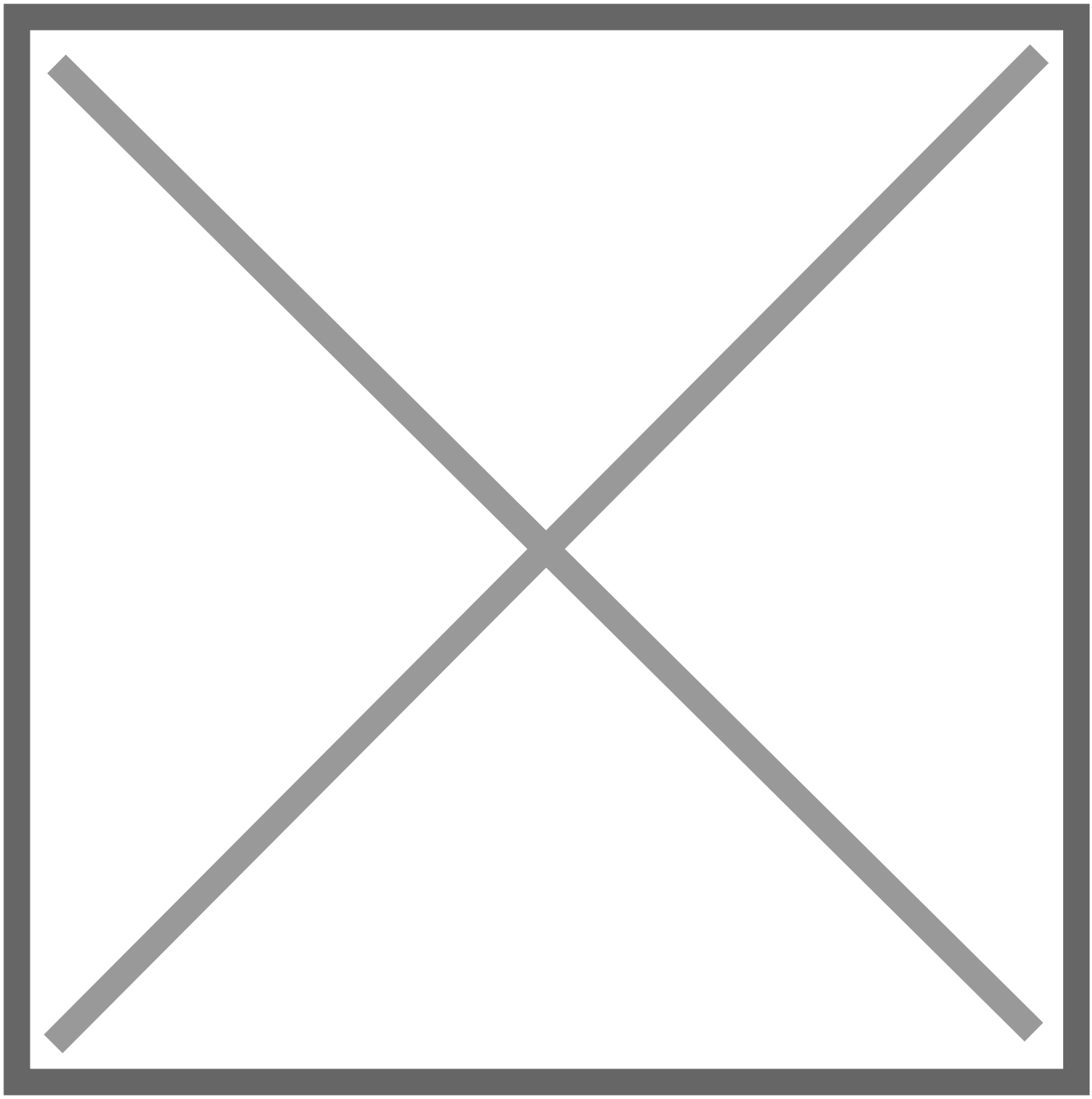
Vatican
Vatican News



Relatives and friends react during a funeral ceremony in Kryvyi Rih, Ukraine, April 7, 2025, for two 15-year-old teenagers Alina Kutsenko, and Danylo Nikitskyi, who were killed in a Russian airstrike April 4, as a result of which 20 people died, including children, and 70 people were injured in the town of Kryvyi Rih. (OSV News/Reuters)

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Near Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine — April 9, 2025
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As Ukraine experienced a deadly weekend with a barrage of attacks from Russia on Kryvyi Rih and Kyiv, the capital, the papal almoner handed a gift from Pope Francis — four ambulances — to local authorities in Zaporizhzhia. The papal point man on charity was also personally distributing bread to the needy population during his 10th mission to the war-torn country.

"This gift is precisely for those that are victims of those attacks on a daily basis in Ukraine," Cardinal Konrad Krajewski told OSV News about the four ambulances he drove to Ukraine for almost 1,800 miles along with three other priest-drivers.

The "super modern" professional units will serve mostly on the frontlines to drive injured soldiers to Zaporizhzhia hospitals, the cardinal said. The ambulances were handed to local authorities in the eastern Ukraine town on April 8.

"We unfastened the Vatican registration plates, and handed the Ukrainian side all the documents," Krajewski, prefect of the Dicastery for the Service of Charity said about the handover. The ambulances had a gift inside the gift, the prelate said. "We brought with these four ambulances a rather massive amount of medicines worth 200,000 Euros (about $220,000)."

The medicines were collected by pharmacists in Naples "as their Lenten alms for Ukraine," the cardinal told OSV News, with a contribution also from the Vatican pharmacy and Gemelli hospital, where Francis spent over a month for pneumonia treatment.

Three ambulances were donated to Zaporizhzhia's and one to Kharkiv's authorities.

The cardinal along with four drivers — a bishop and two priests serving in Ukraine — were on their way to Ukraine when a Russian ballistic missile strike on a civilian district April 4 targeted a playground where children with their parents were playing on swings and in sandpits on a Friday afternoon in Kryvyi Rih, the hometown of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Nine children were killed among 20 people by a Russian missile that tore through apartment buildings. More than 70 were wounded in the attack. Among the victims was 3-year-old boy Tymofii, who died along with Arina and Radyslav, both 7 years old, at the playground. Danylo Nikitskyi, a 15-year-old student, also died in the attack alongside his girlfriend, Alina Kutsenko, also 15. "They were holding hands," Roman Nikitskyi, Danylo's father, said, according to The Associated Press.

The U.N. Human Rights Office in Ukraine said it was the "deadliest single strike harming children which the Office has verified since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022," and the deadliest attacks so far this year.

"It's an unimaginable horror — nine children killed, most while playing in a park, as a military weapon exploded into shrapnel above them," Volker Türk, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights said April 6.

"Precisely in a moment like this, we need the closeness of the Holy Father and our cardinal," Auxiliary Bishop Jan Sobilo of Kharkiv-Zaporizhzhia told OSV News of the mission of the prefect of the Dicastery for the Service of Charity.

Sobilo, who — like Cardinal Krajewski — is Polish, and drove one of the ambulances to Ukraine, told OSV News that "the visit gives us an impression that we are not alone. The papal blessing is protecting us, we feel it."

The bishop stressed that "when the cardinal is here, the panic goes away."

"The fact that he is not afraid to come as Russia strengthens the attacks on Ukraine for us is a sign to not be afraid," he said. "He gives us courage," the bishop

underlined.

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Sobilo said that, along with the ambulances, the pope made a significant gift to the local hospital in Zaporizhzhia. A portable X-ray machine was donated to the local clinic, where soldiers are brought from the frontline.

"If a tank smashes a leg of a soldier, before the operation, he needs to go to an X-ray room, then be transferred to the operation room, and then back to X-ray. With the new portable machine, the doctors save time," Sobilo said.

"When the Holy Father learned that this machine may save the lives of Ukrainians, he immediately made the decision to donate," Sobilo said.

It's "a sign of unity with these people and joining in the suffering," Krajewski said of the medical gifts.

"The Holy Father made a surprise call last night," Krajewski said in a voice message sent to OSV News April 9.

"You could tell that the Holy Father is also with them in this way by calling and blessing them," he said of Ukrainians shocked by a recent wave of Russian attacks, including those on Kyiv, the capital, that killed one person on April 6.

On April 8, in the early morning and amid freezing weather, the cardinal was distributing food packages to the needy population at the Sanctuary of God the Merciful Father in Zaporizhzhia.

"From five o'clock people were already waiting to receive a very modest portion of food — half a loaf of bread, two cans of meat spread and an instant soup. More than a thousand people were waiting in line," Krajewski said.

He said that he was happy to help as "there was an opportunity to meet these people, to look into each other's eyes, their eyes full of hope, full of kindness and gratitude for being able to receive at least such a modest meal," the cardinal said.

The bread distributed at the sanctuary is baked by the Albertine brothers, who carry the charism of St. Brother Albert, a Polish friar who tended to the homeless and poor

in the late 19th and early 20th century.

"They have a bakery, but this oven is already 15 years old, so after seeing it I promised them that the Holy Father would buy a new oven for the brothers," Krajewski said.

He told OSV News that the bread distribution in Zaporizhzhia is an "Eucharistic miracle" for people who "experience real hunger."

"No one knows whether there will be 1,000 people, or 1,200, or 1,300," he said. "And they never ran out of bread. It was never the case that someone had to leave empty-handed."

On April 9 the cardinal started to make his way home, to Rome, through Lviv.

This story appears in the **War in Ukraine** feature series. View the full series.