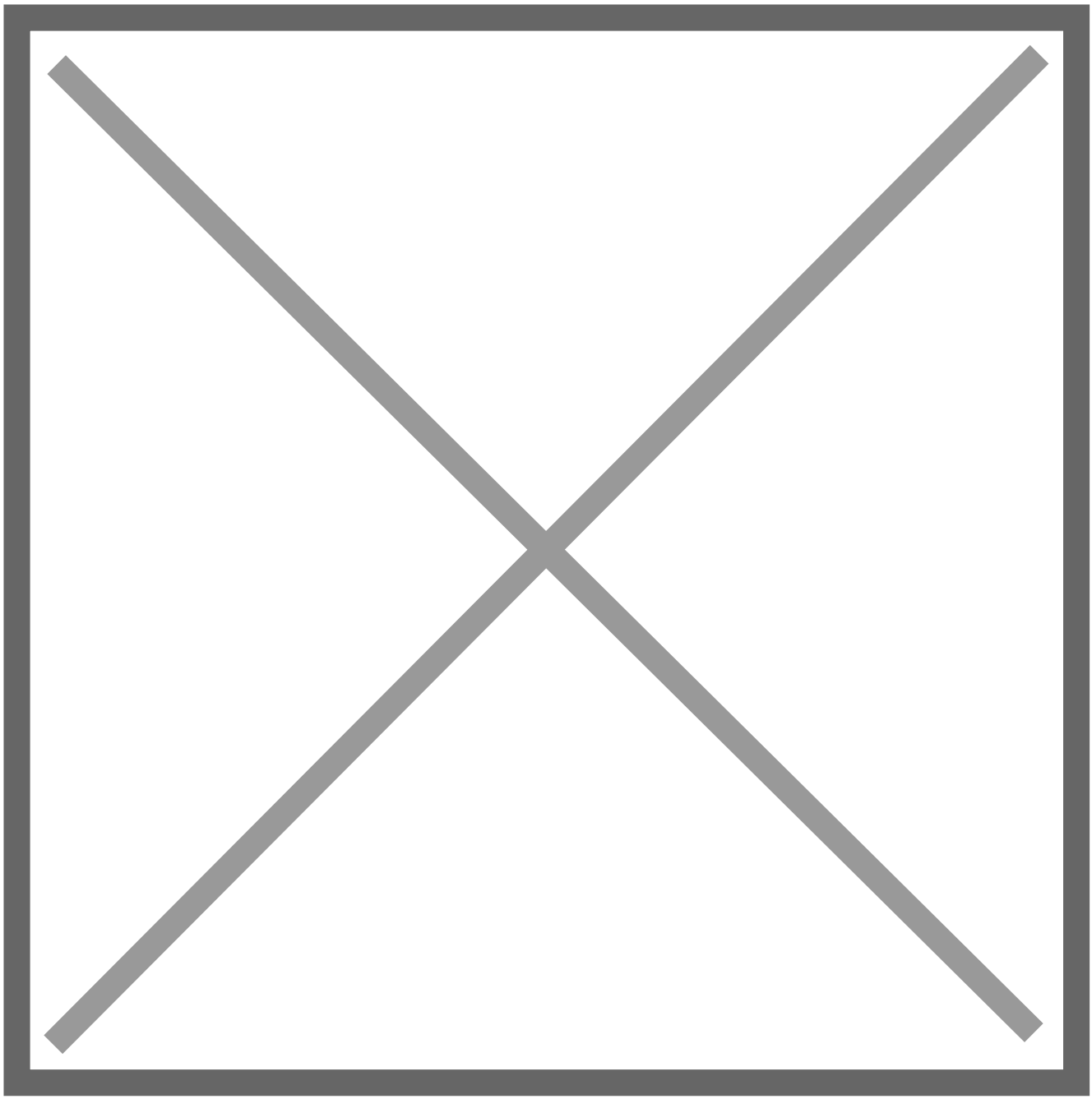
News



Firefighters work at the site of a residential building damaged during Russian drone and missile strikes in Kyiv, Ukraine, Feb. 22, 2026. (OSV News/Valentyn Ogirenko, Reuters)

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On the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Catholic bishops of the U.S. said "the people of God resist, trust, and pray" despite the "countless deaths and millions of casualties" the brutal conflict has claimed in 12 years of warfare.

The bishops, led by Metropolitan Archbishop Borys Gudziak of the Archeparchy of Philadelphia, issued a statement a day prior to the anniversary of Russia's Feb. 24, 2022, invasion, while observing the war began with Russian-backed attacks on the country in 2014.

In their statement, the bishops said "the genocidal intent is manifest" as Russia has regularly pummeled Ukraine's energy grid, leaving millions without heat or electricity for days at a time, amid a winter that has been "the harshest in years."

The bitter cold, with temperatures dropping well below freezing on a sustained basis, "has been deliberately exploited to break the spirit of a nation ... standing for freedom, justice, democracy, and God-given human dignity."

"It is a war against the people," said the bishops.

They stressed that "Russia has systematically targeted Ukraine's social and spiritual infrastructure," pointing to "at least 2,881 attacks" on health care sites and personnel across the country.

Well over 4,000 educational institutions have been damaged, with 408 destroyed, said the bishops, noting Russia's attacks on Ukrainian schools — which have seen children move to underground classrooms, or forego education altogether — affects "millions of children," a number the United Nations recently put at about 4.6 million.

Russia has also taken aim at Ukraine's religious communities, the bishops said, explaining that the Catholic Church and other Christians not affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church have been systematically persecuted under Russian occupation.

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"More than 600 churches and places of worship, representing various denominations, have been damaged or leveled," they said, noting that "civilian prisoners, including clergy, are mercilessly tortured."

In March 2024, the Russian Orthodox Church declared Russia's war on Ukraine a "holy war." Patriarch Kirill, the church's head, told believers in a September 2022 sermon that Russian military personnel killed in Ukraine will have "all sins" washed away by their deaths.

Russian officials in the occupied Zaporizhzhia region formally "banned" the UGCC, the Knights of Columbus and Caritas.

Two UGCC Redemptorist priests, Fr. Ivan Levitsky and Fr. Bohdan Geleta, were abducted in late 2022 and subjected to torture while held in Russian custody for some 18 months prior to their Vatican-brokered release.

Multiple human rights reports have documented that torture — including beatings, mutilation and burning — and execution are commonplace and systematic in Russian captivity.

The bishops underscored these events to highlight how Ukrainians "stand and fight evil and tyranny to live and witness to the truth" at tremendous cost.

"Despite it all," said the bishops, Ukrainians "live with gratitude. First, to God. And to all people who help."

"They thank Americans and all people of goodwill throughout the world for their prayers," the bishops said. "Prayers move mountains."

In addition, Ukrainians "are grateful to all who stay informed, who counter disinformation, and who advocate for justice, a truly just peace," said the bishops.

They concluded, "In their name, we ask that you continue until God's truth prevails. It will. Our faith and our hope are in the Lord."

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