

Cardinal driving ambulance from Vatican to Ukraine

By Paulina Guzik  (https://twitter.com/Guzik_Paulina)



Mar 26, 2022 | Contributor



Pope Francis blesses an ambulance he has donated to the people of Ukraine on March 23, 2022. Also pictured is Polish Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner, who is driving the ambulance to Lviv, in western Ukraine. (Credit: Courtesy of Cardinal Konrad Krajewski.)

A Catholic cardinal and close papal aide is driving an ambulance blessed and donated by Pope Francis to western Ukraine to serve the civilian population fleeing the Russian invasion.

Polish Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner, took on the assignment right after returning from Fatima, Portugal, where he led a ceremony consecrating Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

“This is a concrete help that the Holy Father offers to the suffering people of Ukraine,” Krajewski told *Crux*.

The city of Lviv, where the ambulance is heading, had a pre-war population of around 720,000, but nearly 500,000 internally displaced people have arrived since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24.

“We want to assist them; we hope this ambulance will serve the people in Lviv since most Ukrainian ambulances were sent to the frontlines,” the cardinal said.

According to Krajewski, Francis prayed for a long time over the ambulance.

“The inside of the ambulance is blue, like an operation room, but blue is also a color of the Virgin Mary,” he added.

“When I was in Ukraine, people asked for a consecration of Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and for closing the sky over Ukraine,” the cardinal said, referring to the Ukrainian government’s request for a no-fly zone to be established over the country.



Pope Francis speaks to Polish Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner, March 23, 2022.
(Credit: Courtesy of Cardinal Konrad Krajewski.)

Krajewski said the Vatican is doing its part in meeting the needs of the Ukrainian people, and the brand new ambulance is a sign of its support.

Departing from Rome, Krajewski is taking another driver with him – a homeless man from Poland, whom he will leave in Krakow: “We will switch behind the wheel; it’s a long ride from Rome to Eastern Europe,” he told *Crux*. From Krakow, the cardinal will continue

driving to Lviv on his own.

Krajewski spent six days in Ukraine in mid-March after being appointed as a special envoy by the pope. He helped provide funding for supplies and organized an interreligious prayer service for peace in the Lviv Latin Rite Catholic Cathedral.

This time, he said, he will stay in Ukraine for as long as he will be needed.

A second ambulance is planned to be brought to Ukraine for Holy Thursday, “as a sign of washing the feet of the suffering nation,” Krajewski said.

The papal almoner’s office is also helping with the distribution of funds. On Thursday, for instance, the pontifical archeological institute brought money to send to Lviv and fund the protection of architectural treasures.

“It is one of the important needs,” Krajewski told *Crux*. “When I was in Lviv, I saw figures of saints on the cathedral wrapped and protected – all this costs money.”

Asked about the diplomatic strategy of Pope Francis during the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Krajewski said, “Pope Francis acts according to the logic of the Gospel. When Jesus stood in front of Pilate, he didn’t say he’s crazy, he didn’t condemn him.”

The pope’s task, the cardinal explained, is not to condemn a person, but his actions: “Pope Francis condemned President Putin’s actions. The Church condemns the war, condemns the killings.”

“We want him to be a spiritual leader, and at the same time some would like him to speak like a politician. And this is a contradiction,” he said.

“Had the pope used harsher words, would it change the course of the war?” Krajewski asked.

The cardinal himself is preparing to transform his office into a new dicastery under the apostolic constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, which goes into effect on June 5.

With the creation of the new Dicastery for the Service of Charity, “Pope Francis showed how

important charity is in his pontificate,” Krajewski said.

“I read the new apostolic constitution according to the rule of two arms of Pope Francis: faith and mercy. All the rest comes afterwards,” he said.

“Our operations will not change,” the cardinal continued. “Really, even the name won’t change. The power of this office is not and will not be measured in the piles of papers and levels of bureaucracy.”

Krajewski added that the strength of his office is in action.

“This is what Jesus was doing: He blessed, he healed, he forgave sins. He didn’t organize summits and conferences, and it is not the job of my office either. It is the deeds.”

Follow Paulina Guzik on Twitter: [@Guzik_Paulina](https://twitter.com/Guzik_Paulina) (https://twitter.com/Guzik_Paulina)