Ukraine Aktuell.

No. 9 New Year I 2026

Christmas Angels by Oksana Drachkovska

DEAR FRIENDS!

The fifth year of war is beginning, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to write whatsoever. But one thing remains and is certainly growing: our gratitude for everything you have done!

So, at the beginning of the New Year, we would like to express our deepest gratitude along with our warmest wishes! Without you, the winters would be even colder and darker, and the children would have less reason to smile. Last year, we sent many large parcels with warm clothing from Berlin and the surrounding area to Ukraine, as well as countless candles and wax, so that it would not be so gloomy during the hours of darkness. The children from the small Waldorf school in Horodenka were delighted not only with the clothes, games and sweets, but also with the recorders, guitar, violin, paper, brushes and paints. Many thanks for this as well! The orphaned children, who are able to spend such important days of rest in Lutsk with the painter Tatyana Myalkovska, enjoy art therapy, music therapy and trauma therapy. They are also delighted with the warm clothes and art supplies. Many children in hospitals in Dnipro were also happy to receive the warm clothes that were sent.

I just received a small package as a thank you for the support from the Sophia Waldorf School and the Borysphen Waldorf School in Kyiv. This token of thanks goes to all of you!

From time to time, we also support individual families who have had to leave their homes in eastern Ukraine and start a new life in the west of the country. They need support, for example, to pay school fees at the Waldorf School or to buy wood for heating; sometimes they also need medical assistance.

Last year, financial support was also given to a number of Ukrainian artists: painters, writers and musicians. They are having a particularly hard time. For some, we organised exhibitions, for others we donated money for medical care, and for others it was necessary to support them in order to survive the cold and lack of electricity.

Ukrainian young people also need support so that they can attend our youth conferences. This is often the only opportunity for them to be in a peaceful environment with others like-minded youth, to sing, play, dance and laugh. Only loud clapping is difficult for them. Their bodies react to such noises with great anxiety.

Books are still very popular as gifts. Books are needed more than ever in difficult times. But thanks to your help, we can also support the translation and publication of important educational and anthroposophical works, such as ‘The Study of Man”.

I would particularly like to thank our congregation in Berlin, which does so much to help Ukrainians feel at home here. But I hear this from many other congregations as well. Many thanks you all, dear congregations who help in need!

We also occasionally support aid organisations in which our friends work or which were founded by our friends. These organisations ensure that people in need have bread, water and food. In the report by Minka Mayer, a young Waldorf teacher from Germany who currently lives and works in Kyiv, you will learn more about 'Muraschky' ("Ants").

At the end of this New Year's greeting, I would like to once again express my heartfelt thanks for your warm thoughts, prayers and financial support! And no matter how small this support may seem to you; it has a big impact: you give people a sense of hope. You let people in need feel that they are not alone.

Wishing you a peaceful and New Year full of light.

YOURS SINCERELY, YAROSLAVA BLACK AND BEN BLACK

STANDING IN PEACE

Peace! In Ukraine, it is a familiar word, but an almost forgotten state of affairs. The duration of the war is now counted in years – it is already the fourth year – and we can hardly remember how it felt when it was still counted in days, weeks or months. Time passes quickly and the state of war has become our 'normal life'.
Peace is longed for, but most people in Ukraine have given up on basing their hopes on any concrete prospects: 'after the elections in the USA', 'after a new delivery of weapons', 'after the very strict sanctions', 'after the endless negotiations'. After many unfulfilled promises, the situation is even worse than before, and above all, hope is not yet peace. For hope lives from the future, and peace is a present state. There is much talk of peace in politics today. And the government is making a sincere effort to achieve peace as a "lasting situation without war". May it come soon! But real peace is more than a 'condition without war'.
'Everything looks so peaceful here,' said Bertolt Hellebrand, one of my colleagues and

friends, when he spent five days in Odessa a few months ago for a course at the Proseminar. We were sitting in a café and had ordered Thai lunch. The small restaurant was full of visitors who, like us, were enjoying their lunch. Outside, the sun was shining and there were many pedestrians walking peacefully and without haste. It was hard to believe that Odessa was a war zone. I tried to explain to my colleague that things can look very different here: you wake up at night to the incessant buzzing, humming, roaring, whirring, shaking and/or exploding. Most of the noises are deafeningly loud, which is confusing in itself. But these noises also bring with them a very real danger – the possibility of destruction, injury and death. This image of the city is anything but peaceful! The people here have learned to distinguish quite well from the noise what is flying overhead. Everyone tries to sense whether the noise poses a concrete threat or whether something is 'just' flying by. The attacks can last for several days or weeks and then stop again for days or even weeks. And you never know when it will start and when it will end. You can try to track where something is flying and where it is heading in various chats and Apps. Warfare technology is developing rapidly! But it also means that missiles can change direction at any time.

Then I tell my colleague that war, no matter how peaceful people may appear, does not leave them unaffected inside. The danger, even the anticipation of danger, stirs up their inner feelings. There are many traumatised people, and the trauma manifests itself in very different ways. It can show up as 'mere' palpitations, breathing difficulties, muscle cramps, like some people experience an icy coldness throughout their entire body at the slightest hint of danger. After the air raid siren and a stay in the air-raid shelter, the children are no longer easy to calm down. The first thing that strikes you is that after so many years, everyone is deeply exhausted! That is the peculiarity of this war: it does not only have external targets – military bases or the enemy's weapons, energy facilities, water dams and logistics lines – this war targets the human soul. People are attacked internally, either by immediate danger, by the expectation of danger, or by worries about friends and relatives who are in danger. Even before the war began, the attackers made a clear statement, saying in essence: Even if we do not defeat you, we will spread an atmosphere of fear and terror among you to such an extent that you will perish as a result. Fortunately, this goal is still far from being achieved, but there is a great deal of suffering, hardship and discord. Awareness of the danger has either been present for a long time or is constantly being reawakened. There was not a single day during the war years without an air raid siren. Whether the attack came afterwards or not, the inner self had already been attacked. And all the people of Ukraine must learn to deal with the war against their inner selves. Everyone seeks inner peace in their own way. This cannot be achieved without personal effort: one must counter external dangers and worries with something internal. How can this be done? Where the strength of calmness or inner peace comes from remains

something of a mystery. But one thing is clear: it can only be found through effort of attainment!

Two examples of this: One of the volunteers, who has various tasks to perform on the front line, said with a smile, but quite seriously: ‘Before you get scared, you have to manage to think of something cheerful or even funny. It's best to tell those around you right away, even in the worst situations!’ He didn't say whether this always works, but it's about the effort: don't let fear become the master of your soul! Buddha is said to have once told his disciples: even in the face of death, you must not fail to admire the beauty around you. Apparently, humour can help with this. It seems important to me that in times of danger, you don't let your attention be distracted by anything other than your own self. And that can work wonders! Your inner self must not be dependent on the outside world. Stay alert to what is happening around you, but don't get caught up in what you perceive; decide for yourself how you react. This helps not only on the front line, but wherever danger arises and exists. When the self becomes the master of the soul, peace enters the soul. Even in ‘conditions without war,’ this ability is helpful, but in war it is lifesaving!
Another situation: A woman from Kyiv – Natalia – learned at the very beginning of the war that her brother had been taken prisoner. She only hinted at how much suffering this caused her: not knowing where he was or how he was, not knowing whether he was suffering or starving, whether he was alive or not. But she did not want to remain inactive and out of her distress, began to do something for her brother. She first found some women who were in a similar situation. This led to the formation of a group of mothers, sisters, wives and daughters who did everything in their power to free their loved ones. At first, it seemed hopeless, as there were hardly any official structures in place to work towards this goal. But the women began to raise awareness of their plight wherever they could. They formed a network of people in need and ultimately managed to reach the highest authorities in the country and around the world, including the Pope. This bore fruit and after many long months of uncertainty and worry, what had initially seemed impossible happened: the first prisoners came home, and one of them was Natalia's brother. The events and suffering of war overwhelm people and go far beyond their personal strength and capabilities. One feels helpless and powerless. It seems hopeless to oppose such inhuman and overwhelming events. Nevertheless, we must not remain inactive! We begin to do something; we try to help where we can; we seek and find like-minded people – and we support each other. In other words, we start walking, and as we walk, the path emerges! And this not only bears fruit, but also brings peace. Natalia's brother came back, but she carries on. She does not abandon her friends who still have loved ones in captivity. The network of like-minded people remains intact, and through such networks of people of good will, peace can and will come. Peace begins within. It begins as acceptance of life, with its

hardships, its suffering and death. This acceptance is hindered by the awareness that these hardships, sufferings and death are caused by people, by the attackers. All this can make people feel powerless. The only remedy in this situation is to find an area in which I, as a human being, can be alert, active and effective. Peace must be actively attained!

During our autumn trip through Central Europe, my wife had the opportunity to sing in a choir a few times. When it became known that we were from Ukraine, one of the other singers said: 'But you don't live there now, do you? You live somewhere else?' 'No, we still live there and came from Odessa a few days ago, and we'll be going back there soon.' 'But that's impossible! How is that possible? You should leave the country!' 'My husband is a priest...' First moment of realisation for our conversation partner... '...and I'm a therapist.' 'Oh, I see...' That seemed to clear everything up for the woman. She didn't say exactly what had become clear to her, and we moved on to other topics. Today, it seems that even talking about the war being waged elsewhere robs one of inner peace. Millions of people currently live in Ukraine, most of whom are neither priests nor therapists – and yet they continue to live their lives!
I think that many people have an inkling that the answer to the question of war and peace has a spiritual dimension. The question of peace – whether external or internal – has to do with the question of our relationship to the spiritual world.
If you ask people on the street why they are staying in the country, you get everyday answers: 'It's my country, I don't want to leave it in this time of need.' 'This is my city and this is where I want to live.' 'I can't say exactly, but I'm staying ...' "... My family, friends and job are here.' 'I want to protect, care for and help.' Hardly anyone mentions the word "fate" or even 'karma". But deep down, even if they don't say so, people have a sense of destiny. A sense of belonging to a place, a task and the people they belong with. The feeling of being in the right place at the right time. If you feel this connection to your own destiny, you can find inner peace despite fears, worries and dangers. Because, whether people know it or not, it is about the connection to Christ. He is the one who rules over our destiny and gives us 'his peace', as it says in John 14.
During this time, the congregation in Odessa remains the place where people consciously seek this connection with destiny and with Christ. This happens in the

Gospel and discussion groups that take place weekly; in the prayer vigils that we hold regularly and on various occasions – be it war events or personal needs; in art – we sing a lot, do eurythmy and various artistic master classes. We have two proseminars: one in Odessa and one online for Ukrainians scattered around the world; in encounters and activities where people help where they can.

The altar is and remains the centre of all these activities. We feel that here we are constantly given new strength for life. From there, we are convinced, spiritual forces of peace flow out into the world with every Act of consecration.

ANDREJ ZILTSOV

VOLUNTEERING IN UKRAINE

I was given the small task of writing about my life and work in Ukraine. I feel honoured, but now I'm sitting here struggling to find the words, which just don't seem to flow. I simply don't have the vocabulary to convey the force of the night-time explosions, the existential fear that sometimes grips me when I hear the sound of an Iskander cruise missile approaching overhead. I cannot put into words the fatigue I feel after long sleepless nights, followed by a day full of challenges that need to be overcome. The hot shower that could revive my spirits often falls flat because there is no electricity and therefore no hot water – if there is any running water at all. And yet there is always a small glimmer of light in the midst of the darkness, even if it is only the beam of my torch that helps me navigate my way through the kitchen.
In four days, I will have been in Kyiv for 16 months. What was supposed to be a one-year stay has turned into an open-ended one. I have since cleared out my storage room in Germany and given away everything except for two boxes. I quit my job as a class teacher in 2024 after eleven years. It seemed to me that it was time to throw my small weight into the balance to counter Russian aggression. And despite all the difficulties – the second winter of war is more gruelling than the first – I have not regretted it for a second.

The Charity organisation Ants Kitchen (Murashky) in the Troyeshchyna district of Kyiv, is now my home. Volunteers work here seven days a week. They weigh, grate, bake, wash and pack. Around 35,000 dry rations are sent from here to the front line every month, to positions where cooking is impossible. The rations are light and robust, so they can also be dropped by drone over positions. Almost everything is done by hand. We dry herbs, vegetables and fruit in 14 drying ovens and bake crackers and gingerbread as a substitute for bread. Our menu also includes muesli, various soups, porridges, purées, dried meat (jerky) and desserts made from nuts and dried fruit. In winter, teas are added, such as a lemon-ginger-honey mixture. Most of the helpers are women. Some have regular jobs, some are retired. There is laughter and a jovial atmosphere, and people talk about who has electricity when and how to organise their lives around the hours-long power cuts. Sometimes grief and despair break out, or homesickness for homes in the occupied territories, and tears flow. Then, for a moment, the deep pain of the people becomes visible before it fades away again. Everyone carries their own burden and works with unwavering determination.

The people here have grown dear to my heart with their indescribable hospitality. The word has spread that I no longer have an income, so they slip me little things here and there, clothing, vegetables from the garden, cooked Ukrainian specialities, even though they themselves don't have much. I had to learn to accept this. That's Ukraine – warm and welcoming. Even after heavy attacks, the kitchen is still buzzing with activity. We are still alive, and that is the main thing. We will get through everything else.

It is the first day of winter that snow is falling in Kyiv. I even have electricity for a few hours; it is warm and dry in my flat. It may sound strange to Western ears, but I am infinitely grateful to all the people who protect the sky above our heads in all weathers, who risk their lives to hold the front line in snow and slush, and who make it possible for me and us to live here in Kyiv. And I end as speechless as I began. Because sometimes words are simply not strong enough.

MINKA MEIER

FROM HEAVEN ON HIGH

The fresh snow made the city look clean and festive. Jan pulled his younger sister Lea by the sleeve through the streets.
'Hurry up, it's not just snow falling from the sky!'
But Lea stuck out her tongue and tried to catch a few snowflakes with it.
'Come on!' said Jan a little more sternly. 'Grandma and Grandpa will be worried.'
But Lea didn't want to hear the word 'worried' that day. 'You always have to hurry,' she thought, 'especially when those annoying air raid sirens are wailing.'
But now it was very quiet, and the CINNAMON & SONDERS bakery smelled of gingerbread and roasted almonds.
'Can't we go in there for a minute?' Lea begged. 'Just for a tiny bit?'
Jan shook his head.
'No, we can't,' said Jan. 'Firstly, Grandfather said "hurry". And secondly, I don't feel like being buried under a mountain of chocolate cakes.'
At first, Lea thought it was funny. She imagined how they would have to eat their way through a mountain of cakes. But then she began to sob.
'I don't want to die. Not even under cakes. I'm only six.'
'We're not going to die,' Jan began to reassure his sister. 'Do you remember what Grandfather said the other day?'
'What?' Lea asked quietly.
'He said that our father is going to get a new job.'
Lea stared at her brother.
Jan pointed his finger at the sky.
'Father is now working as an angel,' he said calmly.
Since last winter, however, he had been doubting whether he should still believe in angels. But he didn't tell Lea that. He liked the idea that his father was now working in heaven. He probably closes heaven when the rockets fly and opens it again when it snows like today.
Jan smiled contentedly and searched for something in his pocket.
'Here,' he said to Lea. 'I still have some pocket money and you can buy something with it.'
'Hurray! You're the sweetest ever!' Lea exclaimed enthusiastically. Her fear disappeared as suddenly as it had come.
Lea felt a warm bag of almonds in her coat pocket, and Jan carefully put a chocolate éclair in the shopping bag. That would surely make his grandparents happy. Her mother hadn't eaten sugar for two years, and it was difficult to find anything to please her.
In front of the flower shop were large jugs and buckets filled with pine branches, holly,

juniper and strangely scented eucalyptus. And among all the greenery, beautiful little silver-white flowers shimmered.
‘Beautiful!’ said Lea, moving closer to smell the flowers. They had no scent and were cold. Snow lay on the branches, pots, paving stones, steps and streetlamps. Everything was so beautiful that Lea was breathless. She didn't want to breathe at all, so as not to destroy this beauty. But how terribly frightened she was when the air raid siren wailed! She wanted to run, stumbled, fell onto the cold ground between the fir tree and the Christmas roses and covered her head with her hands. She was jolted out of her stupor by her brother's voice as he tried to lift her off the ground.
‘Lea, come on, we have to go to the cellar!’
But Lea could neither move nor speak. She lay there like a little bird that senses danger and flaps its wings.
‘Lea, Lea! Get up!’ Her brother tugged at her sleeve. She wanted to get up, but her feet wouldn't move. Her whole body felt heavy and immobile, as if the cold Ice Queen of Narnia had breathed on her. Jan crouched down next to Lea and held her close.
‘It's okay, it'll be over soon!’
He looked up at the sky and saw the terrible fireworks of the explosion. Lea turned her head up and whispered, ‘Our Father... our Father... in the heavens...’
Jan felt his eyes burn and his lips tremble.
‘He's here,’ he whispered, ‘...he's coming. You'll see.’
The boy looked up at the sky again, even though it took a great deal of effort. Stars glowed between the snow clouds, and in the distance, there was a red light. And then he saw him, his father. He was not alone. There were many of them. Like bright, glowing clouds driven by the wind, they whizzed across the sky. They stretched thin silver threads criss-crossing the city. It was like a net, only thinner. Lea looked up too.
‘Father!’ she cried with relief. ‘He's here!’
‘Yes, he's closing the heavens above us,’ said Jan with relief. He was pretty sure what he was seeing: A glowing figure came a little closer, and Jan saw the outstretched silver wings, like a cloak, directly above the children. Then it became quiet again.
‘Merry Christmas!’ Jan read the glowing letters in the window of a bakery on his way home. Lea clutched the pot of Christmas roses that the nice saleswoman at the flower shop had given her.
At home, Lea placed the Christmas roses and roasted almonds on the table. Later, when her mother arrived, she would tell her everything. Meanwhile, Jan sat quietly at the kitchen table and looked out of the window at the sky.
Another Christmas we've survived, he thought.

A STORY BY YAROSLAVA BLACK

Waldorf School in Horodenka received recorders from Berlin

Congregation in Kyiv

Shepards play in Kyiv

Tetyana Nechetylo Priest in Kyiv

Donations to support refugees and humanitarian aid in connection with the war can please be transferred to the account of the West German Region of the Christian Community with a corresponding reference in the purpose of use:
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