

Ukrainian students among those attending St. Thomas University's prayer vigil for peace

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Jim Davis - Florida Catholic



Photographer: JIM DAVIS | FC

Students, faculty and administrators lead an Interfaith Prayer Vigil for Peace at St. Thomas University March 29, 2022. At far left is Roza Pati, co-director of the Graduate Program in Intercultural Human Rights at St. Thomas University, and next to her are Ukrainian students Dennis Bakaiev and Marina Korolyova.



MIAMI GARDENS | The recent prayer vigil for Ukraine at [St. Thomas University](#) hit Dennis Bakaiev especially hard.

Bakaiev, one of two Ukrainian students at STU, said he's a lieutenant in his homeland's reserves – and he has to return to his war-torn country after graduating in May.

But he took encouragement from the prayers as well, saying such services help to keep the public focused on the Russian invasion.

“We have to keep saying that it’s not OK to kill people,” Bakaiev, a native of Odessa, said after the March 29, 2022 prayer vigil. “That should be a basic human right. It needs a proper response.”

Photographer: JIM DAVIS | FC Dennis Bakaiev offers a prayer in Ukrainian at the Interfaith Prayer Vigil for Peace at St. Thomas University March 29, 2022.

The service gathered about 100 faculty, students, staff and visitors at STU’s Chapel of St. Anthony. David Armstrong, university president, said it was important to make students aware of the war in Ukraine, noting that St. Thomas University is the only archdiocesan university in Florida.

“I believe prayer is powerful,” Armstrong told the audience. He asked everyone to pray the rosary daily until the war in Ukraine ends.

Father Rafael Capó, STU’s vice president for mission and ministry, decried “the ongoing losses and hardships, the suffering and plight of the Ukrainian people.”

“Though the time seems dark and our hearts heavy, it is the God of peace who has called us out of darkness,” Father Capó continued. “In God alone is our hope.”

Various leaders offered readings from several cultures besides those in Spanish and English.



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The Rev. David Doriscar, pastor at the Lively Stones Church of Miami, prays at the Interfaith Prayer Vigil for Peace at St. Thomas University March 29, 2022.

Roza Pati, co-director of [STU’s Graduate Program in Intercultural Human Rights](#), spoke in the Albanian tongue of her homeland. Subdeacon Joseph Lahoud, of [Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church](#) in Coral Gables, read from Matthew in Arabic – including the verse, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

Father Capó read an English translation of the Hashkiveinu, a Hebrew prayer for protection. And Bakaiev, a student in the intercultural human rights program, read a prayer in Ukrainian.

The observance featured a candlelight service and congregational singing of the hymns "Peace is Flowing Like a River," "Let There Be Peace on Earth" and an adaptation of the prayer of St. Francis, "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace."

Responsive readings were more pointed, asking God to "defend against every attack the people of Ukraine" and to "deal graciously with the people of Ukraine in their grief."

The readings also offered prayers for refugees and those who have died in the war. They even prayed for the people of Russia and "the enemies of peace," recalling Jesus' command to "love your enemies."

Archbishop Thomas Wenski, the main speaker, stated that globalization has made the war in Ukraine both distant and close to home.

"A just and worthy future for us and our children here will also require a just and worthy future for the people of Ukraine and their children," the archbishop said.



Photographer: JIM DAVIS | FC

Father Rafael Capó, right, vice president for Mission and Ministry at St. Thomas University, speaks with two Ukrainian students, Dennis Bakaiev and Marina Korolyova, after the Interfaith Prayer Vigil for Peace March 29, 2022.

Proper prayers are meant not to bend God's will but to realign people's minds, he added. "His will for us is peace, that we who are made in his image and likeness, live as brothers and sisters. We will only know peace through forgiveness and reconciliation. May God grant us a quick end to the hostilities so that the delicate flower that is peace can blossom on Russian and Ukrainian soil."

Attending the service were members of at least two religious orders: Sisters of St. Joseph Cottolengo and Servants of the Pierced Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Mother Adela Galindo, founder of the Servants, read a prayer for peace by Pope Francis.

In an interview, she said the Servants had taken up a collection for a religious order in Krakow, Poland, the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth. The sisters then were to forward the donation to Catholics in Ukraine.



Photographer: JIM DAVIS | FC

Sister Elizabeth Anne Worley, left, COO of the Archdiocese of Miami, lights the candle of Mother Adela Galindo, founder of the Servants of the Pierced Hearts of Jesus and Mary, during the Interfaith Prayer Vigil for Peace at St. Thomas University March 29, 2022.

“Wherever people suffer, especially unjustly, we want to let them know they are not abandoned,” Mother Adela said.

Marina Korolyova, the other Ukrainian student at STU, said the prayer service was “heartwarming.” The law student said she speaks daily via Skype with her family in her hometown of Zaporozhye, which has been occupied by Russian forces since early March.

“It’s difficult to express my feelings, and I get overwhelmed,” Korolyova said. “Prayer brings them out in a way that’s healing.”

Other STU students at the service agreed. Rosanne Nelan said it was encouraging to hear prayers in several languages. “It makes you feel the world is one,” she said.

Her friend Juan Castellanos agreed. “It was wonderful, seeing a lot of young people coming together for peace, along with the archbishop.”