



**Епархія Чикагская и Средне-Американская
Русская Православная Церковь Заграницей**

**Diocese of Chicago & Mid-America
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February 22/March 7, 2022

Martyrs at the Gate of Eugenius

Statement of the Diocesan Council of the Mid-American Diocese

Call for Prayer – Cease Fire Negotiations

On February 15/28, 2022, cease fire talks were held by both sides in the war in Ukraine, and these talks are ongoing. We call the faithful children of our Mid-American Diocese to renewed prayer for success of these talks and a speedy end to the invasion.

War is, by its very nature, difficult to understand in its entirety. Things change quickly. The media takes part as an arm of the warring parties rather than as a benign entity seeking to inform those outside the war zone. The Church, along with all the people of the world, struggles to understand what is happening in this confusing context.

There has been criticism of the Church's public response to the crisis. On one hand this is understandable from a psychological point of view. People are emotional. They are hurt. They are frustrated. We want to blame someone. To attack. To somehow take part in bringing the war to an end, and we spread these attacks wherever we can. This emotional stress is understood by those who are on both sides of the war, and they use our struggles in this regard for their own purposes. Prayer is criticized as something empty – words that mean nothing. If we believe that is the case – that prayer is nothing but emotional emptiness – then we must indeed criticize all that call for such a response. But if we are Orthodox Christians, and we understand that prayer is real, that God can fix problems in the world that man, being the creation and not the Creator, cannot solve, then criticizing calls to prayer is frankly illogical and even contrary to our faith, and to the goal of changing war to peace.

It is important to understand that the Church will not critique any situation in the same sort of “real time” that the 24-hour news cycle provides to the world. The Church was founded for the salvation of mankind. It does not have a party other than Christ. It does not engage in propaganda, and furthermore, strives to avoid being used in the service of propaganda. Rather, the Church must maintain a space above any conflict, calling mankind to raise itself above the world (in this case, above war to peace), so that it can use this high road to show a path to salvation for all mankind, and especially to parties engaging in war. It is unrealistic to expect the Church to react in any other way, because the Church reacts as it always has: carefully, with prayer and reflection, weighing the actions of the world against the Gospel, so that it is not calling its children to an emotional roller coaster of reaction to this, now to that, now again to this, etc., but calling its children to peace, prayer, and what is most effective for their salvation.

This is not to say that the Church cannot act. It can. And it must. And it does. On Sunday in our Mid-American Diocese a collection in support of the refugees from the present war was taken. Tens of thousands of dollars was raised. This is something to be thankful for, but also insufficient for the immeasurable humanitarian needs of those who are suffering from the invasion. In this regard, we will continue taking a collection each Sunday of the approaching Great Lent in our diocese. All funds will be conveyed to the one person beyond reproach in this conflict, His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphry.

Hieromartyr Ignatius of Antioch writes: “Where the bishop appears, let the people be also, as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Church”. It is the responsibility of the hierarchy to be the voice of the Church in her caring for the souls of the children of God. The Church is holy and sinless, but is a Divine Human organism by God’s design. The faithful of the Church are not without sin and may err. But the Church does not harbor malice on any level and always preaches love for all – even for those who hate us, according to the very words of Jesus Christ. We call those who are engaged in criticism of the Church’s response to share with us, in a positive way, how we might better serve God and man during this time. But we also call all to prayer. Prayer is real. The Lord can solve problems we cannot. If we pray more and bicker less we can have hope that the present war will end more quickly than it otherwise would, and this, in the end, is what matters.