

UKRAINE

18 March 2022

Dear Father Rob ...

I am sorry to impose upon you but may I please ask that you share with your congregation the progress that we have together made since I spoke about our efforts for Ukraine at mass last Saturday evening. I wish I could be with you in person but I am in a small village in the High Atlas mountains of Morocco where I have delivered 70 kgs of clothing to children of impoverished families; this was collected from Knowle and Dorridge families during Lockdown, once again demonstrating the generosity and compassion within our community.

But, our focus is on the dreadful scenes Ukraine. Firstly, on a personal level, can I please thank you for welcoming me and for giving me the opportunity to explain a little about our endeavours. And, secondly, of course to your parishioners who listened so intently and who have responded in such an extraordinary and magnificent way.

As I write this letter, we have raised a scarcely believable £10,202.19. My journey began at 13:00 hrs on Saturday 5 March 2022; I find it incomprehensible, emotional, joyous that we have achieved so much so quickly. Thank you to everyone who has risen up and contributed with such incredible generosity. I undertook to everyone that their money would be spent wisely and right at the front line; that commitment stands.

The situation changes by the day; things have not been eased this week by the fact it has been a national holiday in Hungary on Monday and Tuesday (Revolution Day) so progress has been slower than we would like. Nonetheless, we have achieved a lot.

- 1 The toilet and infant changing cabins at Keleti International Railway Station have been organised after lengthy and sometimes difficult discussions with the authorities. Here is a clear example of how our direct, on the ground networking with the authorities has enabled us to make more progress than many of the bigger aid agencies. 200-300 people, mostly women and children, arrive many times every day by train. It is vital they receive a calm, heated place with proper toilet and change facilities. The containers will be delivered by today and operational as soon as possible.
- 2 These facilities require servicing both in terms of security and cleaning; this has to be provided on a 24/7 basis to ensure both that they are properly maintained and that they are not abused simply by people trying to keep warm. We are building a network of volunteers but there will be costs as some staff, especially security, have to be on an employed basis.

- 3 We continue to buy train (and bus) tickets for those who have nothing. We are also building a team of translators who can help with the inevitable difficulties of communicating between Ukrainian (and/or Russian) and Hungarian.

- 4 We are building a direct connection with a community in Ukraine; this is near a town called Munkacevo in western Ukraine where a temporary refuge / holding centre has been established for many fleeing the dangers. Each Hungarian village has a mayor; the mayor (Bertalan Radnai; 'Berci') of a nearby village, two villages away to my Hungarian friends, is friendly with a priest in a nearby community to Munkacevo; food aid and essential minibus runs are being organised directly to the refuge from these Hungarian villages. Berci and my Hungarian friends do amazing work with river conservation and canoeing activities; I know Beri.

To date, we have spent around £4,000 of the money raised within our community the bulk of which, of course, relates to the toilet and infant changing facilities; these have been rented for an initial one month. My friend Endre, a former accountant with a large oil company, will complete his detailed spreadsheet this weekend. Again, I assure you every penny will be accounted for.

Personally, I return from Morocco on Thursday 24 March 2022. I have a one-way ticket booked to Hungary for Monday 28 March 2022 after which I will be able to provide first hand and more meaningful updates.

Thank you again for your incredible support; if you would like to be involved in any way do, please, take one of the cards that can be found in the entrance foyer and be free to connect with me via the email address provide.

Tragically, our journey is only just beginning.

With my best wishes; Nick