
Exclusive photos of the Vorzel seminary looted by the Russians. ACN will sustain all rebuilding costs

The Aid to the Church in Need Foundation (ACN) will sustain all reconstruction and restoration costs along with purchasing materials and furniture items for the Vorzel seminary in the Kyiv-Zhytomyr diocese (Kiev oblast), which the Russian army virtually destroyed in two raids shortly after the invasion of Ukraine on February 24. Putin's troops entered Ukraine via Belarus with plans to attack the city of Kyiv. Its surrounding districts such as Vorzel, Bucha, Gostomel and Borodyanka thus became epicentres of warfare. All twenty-five seminarians left the premises in Vorzel, together with the rector, Father Ruslan Mykhalkiv, and the teachers, seeking shelter in a nearby village. That is when the Russians looted the seminary. The remaining inhabitants described the devastation and looting to the rector of the seminary. The Russian soldiers broke down the gate and "stole everything they could, food, clothes, cookware, coffee machines, microwave ovens, computers and air conditioners. They rummaged through and ransacked the seminarians' rooms, to the point of stealing the chalice donated by St John Paul II during his 2001 visit to Ukraine." The rector said he understands the theft of food by the local villagers who had nothing left to eat. Several seminarians returned to the seminary at the beginning of April, alongside the rector and Father Igor Skomarovsky, spiritual father of the seminary and parish priest at the nearby St John Paul II church. "We came back to reopen the seminary in the hope of resuming learning and formation activities in September. In the meantime we have been helping the local inhabitants with the distribution of food provided by Caritas," the rector told SIR. Almost 1,000 people showed up the other day. The situation will improve little by little, when social life will be restored with the reopening of businesses and factories." Yet there is still fear for the future, linked not only to the war. The total damage has been estimated at hundreds of thousands of Euros. Construction workers are currently involved in initial repairs now that the water, electricity and gas supply systems have been restored. Substantial support will now be provided by the Pontifical Foundation Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), which has committed to bear all the restructuring costs of the seminary. ACS director Alessandro Monteduro, who visited Vorzel in the framework of a solidarity visit to Ukraine, informed Father Mykhalkiv today: "We decided to support this project - Monteduro told SIR - to give continuity to the efforts of ACS in Ukraine, ongoing since 1963. Our Pontifical Foundation has been present with 3600 projects financed since 2012, amounting to close to €50 million. In Ukraine we provide relief services for refugees from war zones, humanitarian aid for poor families with children, funding for transport costs and for the inclusion of refugee children, or for the extraordinary activities of priests in the occupied Donbas region. Thanks to our benefactors, parishes and monasteries in Ukraine could open their doors to the refugees, providing them with material and spiritual support. Support will also be provided to some 900 Ukrainian seminarians and this latest decision involving Vorzel is a step in this direction." "We are most grateful to ACN" - says Father Mykhalkiv - "if we succeed in bringing our seminarians back here in September it will be thanks to them."

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