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*Thanks to the refugee relief fund, our missionaries were able to immediately jump into action, providing food, clothing, shelter, translation services, language classes and more to those fleeing the war in Ukraine.*



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Our missionaries in Poland have welcomed refugees into our religious houses. Three of our missionaries remain in the western part of Ukraine to look after their parishioners and displaced citizens.

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DIVINE WORD MISSIONARIES  
**mission**  
update

Volume I • 2023

mission stories from around the world  
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Thank You!**

## EDITORIAL

This issue of Mission Update offers a tour of how Divine Word Missionaries are helping—and have helped—impoverished people around the world.

We pay two visits to Africa, to the neighboring countries of Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Both countries are suffering continuous droughts. The lack of rainfall has harmed the agrarian livelihoods and the health of people who were poor to begin with.

In Zimbabwe, Archbishop Alex Thomas SVD of Bulawayo has set up a plan to help the most vulnerable people of his archdiocese: children and the elderly. For children, particularly orphans, he wants to cover their education costs to give them a chance to break free from the cycle of poverty. For the elderly who no longer have anyone to care for them, he wants to provide them with food and affordable medical care.

In Mozambique, Brother Moacir Rudnick SVD runs a nutrition center that provides food for infants and assistance to mothers who need help nursing their children. With the droughts killing crops, Bro. Moacir's nutrition center is the only thing saving many mothers and infants from starvation in his part of Mozambique.

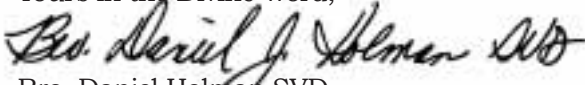
We also visit Papua New Guinea to celebrate the 60th anniversary in the priesthood for Father Joseph Bisson SVD. When Fr. Bisson arrived in that country's mountainous Western Highlands in the early 1960s, there were almost no signs of the outside world. During his time there, Fr. Bisson brought schools, irrigation, electricity—and most importantly the Word of God—to the Highlands people.

Finally, we join Superior General Paulus Budi Kleden SVD on his visit to our missionaries in Ukraine in the days after Christmas. In the immediate aftermath of last year's Russian invasion, the priority for our priests was to provide shelter and supplies to refugees fleeing the war zone. While this need remains, our missionaries have shifted to counseling the mothers, wives and children who fear for their sons, husbands and fathers fighting in the war.

In different countries, Divine Word Missionaries offer themselves in different ways to those who suffer, whether because of war, climate change or other circumstances. In every country, the constant is that our missionaries are the face and hands of God's mercy for those who desperately need to experience it.

Thank you and God bless you for your support.

Yours in the Divine Word,

  
Bro. Daniel Holman SVD  
Mission Director

Contact me any time, my email address is:  
[director@svdmissions.org](mailto:director@svdmissions.org)

**Thank you  
for your  
prayers & support!**

# DIVINE WORD MISSIONARIES mission

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79  
COUNTRIES



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= OUR  
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Cover photo: Alfredo Zuniga

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# UKRAINE

## Thank You

*Paulus Budi Kleden SVD  
and Eryk Koppa SVD  
photos courtesy of  
Arnoldus Nota*



**Thank you for the compassion  
you have shown to our  
brothers and sisters in Ukraine.**

It has been well over 365 days of war

### **UPDATE FROM ROME:**

Divine Word Missionaries continue to support  
the people in this war-torn country...  
now and in the future.

# UPDATE



**The week after Christmas, Superior General Paulus Budi Kleden SVD and General Council member Father Eryk Koppa SVD visited Ukraine to get acquainted with the situation, commitment and work of Divine Word Missionaries in this war-torn country. They were accompanied by the Poland Province's coordinator for justice and peace, Father Krzysztof Malejko SVD.**

**Fr. Kleden and Fr. Koppa's visit was significant and inspiring. They were moved by the bravery of the Ukrainian people and the dedication and commitment of our missionaries, who decided not only to stay in Ukraine during this time of war but also committed themselves to journeying with their people amid all the adversities and dangers.**

Our missionary presence in Ukraine started in 1992 with Father Grzegorz Konkol SVD, who came intending to help the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters for several weeks. He wound up staying in Ukraine for 12 years. Because of his commitment, we now have three missionaries in three parishes that serve several other communities simultaneously.

Father Adam Kruczynski SVD, a pastor in Struga, has been in the country for 23 years. Father Wojciech Michal Zołty SVD, a pastor in Verboviets, is in his 14th year,

while Father Joseph Gwozdz SVD, a pastor in Nova Uszyca, joined the team in November 2022.

**The parishes before and during war**  
Divine Word Missionaries serve in rural areas in the western part of Ukraine, all located in the Diocese of Kamianets-Podilskyi. In recent years, the population of these villages and small towns has skewed older as young people moved to bigger cities seeking better opportunities. With no young, growing families and no children to register, the Verboviets primary school was



closed some years ago. The local people are, in general, poor and living on tiny farms.

Before the war, Ukraine was a country with a population of around 41,000,000, excluding Russian-occupied Crimea. Rough estimates account for 10 million Ukrainians having fled the country. In the first months of the war our three parishes were flooded with refugees from the eastern part of the country, as the western region was a bit safer. Most of the refugees continued to Poland and beyond, others have returned to their homes as the fighting has retreated from their villages and towns.

Our missionaries have reached out to help those refugees who remain in the local villages as well as those who have returned to their homes in the east. They continue to organize supplies of food, medicine and essentials from Poland and other countries to assist those in need. They also provide much needed spiritual support to families who for over a year have faced losing fathers, sons or husbands to the horrors of war.

Ukraine mothers and wives carry the burden of war as they worry about their men between 18 and 60 years old. Many already have been conscripted into military service; others can be called up any time.

### Welcoming and serving refugees

Since the war began around 140 refugees, mostly women and children, have received emergency relief services at the Verboviets parish grounds. Now, most refugees remaining in our communities are hosted by relatives. Two families (11 persons) still live in the Verboviets church compound. Among them is a young mother with two children. The youngest was born three months before our visit. The father is on the battlefield.

Our missionaries collaborate with the Holy Spirit Sisters, who have a convent in Verboviets. Together, they work to assist local families in need of humanitarian assistance. Thanks to the arrangements of generous food supplies donated from several organizations in Poland, our parishes usually have banked several weeks of food for refugee families in need.

### Help still needed

The people in the eastern part of the country, including those who were hosted in our parishes, still need attention and help. Fr. Wojciech organizes assistance for those who have returned to their homes. As winter's temperatures plummet, Ukrainians in the east must deal with frequent electrical outages and blackouts, frozen water pipes and no gas for heat.



At first glance, people in western Ukraine look like they are getting back to everyday life. The roads in the big cities are busy, and, likewise, the shopping centers. Yet there is always a sense of fearful uncertainty. Alarms often ring out announcing the threat of missile and drone attacks. As Russia steps up its missile attacks, Ukraine's infrastructure continues to be

demolished. Beginning at dusk, little or no light shines from apartments and houses. Come nighttime, the roads are dark.

### Priorities and the future...

Before the war the Verboviets parish hosted a well-known children's summer camp. The war has been exceptionally difficult for the children in eastern Ukraine. This past summer, despite the war, the Verboviets parish campground became a haven for children of these war-torn parishes to play and enjoy safe overnight stays.

Fr. Wojciech would like to grow this important outreach for children and is looking into repairs to

the camp facilities so the parish can continue to host children who desperately need a respite from the day-after-day violence. Fr. Wojciech hopes to develop new projects to help these children. With a full-time missionary to organize camp programs, he hopes to help the children deal with the anxiety and trauma of war. He also hopes to repair the kitchen to provide nourishing meals and establish a camp where children can make friends, play and be children in a safe environment.

Looking to the future, the local bishop, the Most Reverend Leon Dubrawski, is open to Divine Word Missionaries creating a parish in one of the bigger cities in his diocese. Although Ukraine is an established Christian country, our mission presence today is much appreciated. Divine Word Missionaries can contribute to developing the local Church, where youth and family pastoral care is needed. Children and families struggle to survive in the midst of war. They will face more uncertainty when the war eventually ends and reconstruction begins.

#### Evolution and direction of the Church

Bishop Dubrawski greatly appreciates that our missionaries decided to stay with their parishioners in this time of war. The local people, too, are grateful. According to our missionaries, the war has brought a new respect for the Roman Catholic Church among the people of Ukraine. The Catholic Church in Ukraine has been there from the beginning organizing help for all in need. Therefore, the relationship between the Catholic Church and Ukrainian Orthodox Church is quite good—but not with the Russian Orthodox Church, which in many places supports the policies of Moscow.

There is enormous tension between the Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox churches. In many areas we saw that Ukrainian Orthodox Christians are constructing new churches because their current buildings belong to the Russian Orthodox Church.

#### Prayers for all

After visiting our parishes, we traveled on to Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, where we walked the neighborhoods of bombed-out buildings and prayed for the loss of life and so many who suffered. Our trip showed us that the presence of Divine Word Missionaries and Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters in Ukraine in this time of war is a strong testimony and a sign of our solidarity with the people of Ukraine. ♦

**Thank you  
for your  
prayers & support!**



## Hospitality to Refugees in the Netherlands

The devastating outbreak of war in Ukraine caused millions to leave their homes, bravely making their way to European countries in search of safety. This included the Netherlands, where our congregation was founded nearly 150 years ago. Here in the Netherlands, our missionaries have partnered with Protestants to help give refugees food, shelters and education.

St. Augustine Parish in Breda and the neighboring Protestant church started weekend classes teaching Ukrainian students and adults the Dutch language and lessons on Dutch culture. The churches also organized Taizé prayer meetings, a simple, meditative form of worship calling to dwell on Christ's presence around and within. Christmas prayer celebrations were also organized, with volunteers providing food and activities for the children.

Divine Word Missionaries continue to help refugees in other cities as well. In Amsterdam, a missionary's office was converted to temporarily house refugees. A parish in southwest Amsterdam hosted a concert to raise funds for the war-torn country. In Schiedam, our missionaries look after refugees by providing essential services. Refugees were included in the Christmas services, singing Ukrainian Christmas songs at the celebration.

The collaboration of Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches can be a beautiful example of unity in the name of Jesus.

## Message from Techny:

We thank you again for your prayers for Ukraine and gifts to our Ukraine Refugee Relief Fund. You have given our missionaries in Ukraine the critical support they have needed to help refugees as well as their parishioners. Your generosity already has made a difference to the people of Ukraine. **But they still need help and will need even more help in the coming days to rebuild all they have lost.**

Please consider another gift to our Refugee Relief Fund by visiting:

**[www.svdmissions.org/ukraine](http://www.svdmissions.org/ukraine)**





**Archbishop  
Alex Thomas SVD**

## **A Relief Plan for Zimbabwe**



## **a Good Shepherd Tends to His Flock.**

*By Jeffrey Westhoff*

Archbishop Alex Thomas SVD oversees the Archdiocese of Bulawayo, located in southwest Zimbabwe. Covering more than 26,000 square miles, the archdiocese serves the poorest region of a country that has been suffering economically for the past 20 years.

The Matabeleland region has been caught in a continuous drought with little rainfall and ceaseless arid conditions. This has caused a severe shortage in safe drinking water and adequate food.

“There are also no employment opportunities since there are no industries,” Archbishop Thomas, said, adding that the region’s unemployment rate stands at roughly 80%. “We are dealing with people with no meaningful income at all. Almost all of them depend on subsistence agriculture and cattle rearing. This is always negatively affected by low rainfall.”

Archbishop Thomas’ flock is suffering, and he has come up with a plan to aid the people of his archdiocese, with its 28 urban parishes and 30 rural missions.



*Children cannot get out of poverty without an education, yet children in poverty cannot afford to get an education.*

He hopes to provide food, education assistance, medical assistance and counseling to those who most need it. The target groups for this assistance are the most vulnerable in his communities: children, especially orphans, and the elderly.

Diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and others contribute to a high death rate in this region, leaving many children as orphans. Only a few orphanages exist in the region to take care of these children, and all of them are located in cities. Yet most of the orphans live in rural areas, taken in by relatives. “In every village we can find about 15 or more orphans,” Archbishop Thomas said. “In our city parishes we also have a good number.”

Orphans face many problems, not all of them economic. “Quite often due to their vulnerability they are abused physically, sexually, verbally and emotionally,” Archbishop Thomas said. Sexual abuse can lead to another social problem: early pregnancy in girls too young to be mothers, too young to head families.

Archbishop Thomas wants to cover the education expenses of orphans and other children whose parents cannot afford these costs. Education is not free in Ghana, which creates a Catch-22 for poor families. Children cannot get out of poverty without an education, yet children in poverty cannot afford to get an education.





“Due to lack of income we have many children who are not able to complete their primary and secondary education,” Archbishop Thomas said.

Citing costs in U.S. dollars, Archbishop Thomas says a child in a rural primary school must pay \$40 for a three-month term, or \$120 a year. For urban primary schools the cost is \$60 a term. The fees go up for secondary schools: \$130 a term in rural areas and \$200 a term in urban areas. At the end of every year there is an extra fee for examinations. There are also additional costs for textbooks and school uniforms.

Archbishop Thomas said that children from the archdiocese who need assistance are identified by their parish priest and the secretary for schools. “Each child we assist brings the invoice from the schools, and we pay them.”

To protect children from abuse, Archbishop Thomas has introduced

safeguarding workshops at the archdiocese’s parish schools. “When it comes to safeguarding, we have a policy for all our schools,” he said. “All children are made aware of it.” Primary schools have regularly scheduled workshops for their students. The children learn how to prevent abuse and how to report it if it happens.



Aside from children, Archbishop Thomas also wants to help older people in his archdiocese. “Our second target group are elderly men and women who have no one to take care of them,” he said. Their children cannot look after them because they have either died or moved to find work in cities with better economic prospects.

“We have a very large group of these elderly people in rural as well as urban areas,” Archbishop Thomas said. “Our aim is to help them with basic food and medical facilities where required.”



The archbishop wants to maintain a monthly food distribution program. “The food items we normally give to people are very basic,” he said. “The staple food here is maize meal, beans and vegetables. To the food pack we also add a bit of cooking oil and soap.”

Every month we will distribute one food package to every recipient. The package will contain 22 pounds of maize meal, 4.5 pounds of sugar beans, 4 pints of cooking oil, and a soap bar. The food will be distributed through parishes. While the food is intended mostly for the elderly, some very poor households with children will also be assisted.

The elderly in urban areas live in poor suburbs in small houses bunched tightly together. These areas have no regular water supply, which can lead to cholera, malaria and water-borne diseases. In rural areas, hospitals do not have adequate medical supplies. These are among the many things that can contribute to health problems among the elderly.

The archdiocese assists in covering the cost of medications for common illnesses and also for hospital admissions including minor surgeries. Young mothers who cannot afford hospital fees for maternity care also receive assistance.

Archbishop Thomas said “Our goal is to help these vulnerable groups ... so that they can feel cared for and feel one with the rest of the community.” ♦

## The world is facing an unprecedented food crisis.



More than half of the world lives in poverty. Millions of people—the elderly, children, women and men—suffer hunger and lack the necessities of life. Your gift could be the difference between going to bed hungry or eating a healthy meal.

Please help us deliver lifesaving food to those most in need. Your gift will help us distribute emergency food to the poorest communities around the world. Your gift will help us provide school meals, community lunch programs and conduct farm training programs.

No gift is too small when someone is hungry.

**Help feed the world – please visit  
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or call toll-free at 800-275-0626**



## Mozambique: battered by climate change and insurgency

After centuries of Portuguese colonial rule, Mozambique became independent in 1975. A civil war followed. Only since 1994 have democratic elections been held in the East African country of 28 million people.

Mozambique feels climate change directly. Tropical cyclones destroy crops and infrastructure.

Climate change is not the only threat. Islamist fighters terrorize the mostly non-Muslim population. Thousands of people have been murdered and their huts set on fire. Hundreds of thousands are fleeing as a result. In September 2022 the community of the Comboni Missionaries in the province of Nampula was attacked and a missionary Sister was shot dead.

Mozambique is one of the least developed countries in the world. On the Human Development Index, which measures life expectancy and education levels, it ranks 185th out of 191 countries.

Seventy percent of the population lives below the poverty line.

Forty percent of the residents are younger than 14 years old.

About half the adults are illiterate.





# in the face of starvation

## Divine Word Missionaries nutrition center feeds Mozambique babies

*By Ulla Arens  
Photos Alfredo Zuniga*



**Droughts, cyclones, floods—climate change is tormenting the people of Mozambique and threatening their babies and young children. Mothers are forced walk miles to obtain just a little food. A nutrition center operated by Divine Word Missionaries is the salvation for many.**

The triplets Fausto, Faruque and Faizal are now 1 year old—and healthy. Their mother, Muachena Amade, owes the fact that her babies did not starve to death to the Pastoral Center for the Promotion of People (CPPH—Centro Pastoral e Promoción Humana) run by Divine Word Missionaries in Liúpo, a district of 89,000 people in northern Mozambique.

“It was a blessing from God to be accepted here,” says Muachena, who has five other children. “I didn’t have enough milk to breastfeed the kids.









After two months we ran out of money. We couldn't buy any more baby milk."

Far and wide, the nutrition center in Liupo is the only place where malnourished babies and toddlers can be nursed. The mothers come when they cannot breastfeed sufficiently, suffer from breast infections or the babies' birth weight is far too low. Mothers such as Muachena who live too far to walk every day can live at the center.

"The mothers stay until the children are over the mountain. It can take a year," said Brother Moacir Rudnick SVD, director of the CPPH. Nine women and 15 children currently live there.

In a kitchen next to the treatment room, freshly cooked vegetables from the center's own garden are used to feed mothers and babies. The small-holders—agricultural landowners whose fields aren't large enough to be considered farms—do not know this diversity. Usually only beans, corn and cassava grow on their manageable fields. Cassava flour with dried fish is therefore the most common meal. And when there is nothing left, people eat unripe mangoes. Or rats.







### Climate change causes hunger

Climate change is particularly relentless in Mozambique. It is the biggest cause of hunger in this East African coastal nation.

Cyclones, floods and droughts alternate. In the early months of 2022, two tropical cyclones roared in, destroying crops and roads. The mud huts of the smallholders, covered with straw or grass, cannot withstand the force and heavy rain of these storms. Only the rats multiply—and eat the grain that is so urgently needed.

The women who live in the CPPH and those who come for outpatient treatment help to tend the center's vegetable beds. They learn which native plants they can grow and how they can improve when cultivating their own fields. Since Bro. Moacir was able to purchase a solar pump, the beds are watered sufficiently and the vegetables are thriving. Now he can give seedlings to the mothers when they leave the feeding center.

“We also teach them which local ingredients can be used to make and enrich baby food,” he says. “Or how to cook *Matapa* for the family, a nutritious cabbage stew with vegetables and peanuts.”





### New recipes against malnutrition

The CPPH holds training courses regularly. Laura João Castigo, a longtime employee of the nutrition center, teaches classes to women on how to use natural ingredients to prepare a dietary supplement that will help them breastfeed their children again.

“Girls often have children very early, at around 14 years of age. There’s a lot they don’t know yet,” Bro. Moacir says.

Muachena and her triplets finally were able to return to their family after 10 months. She wants to help her husband rebuild the hut destroyed by the last cyclone. But the next disaster is looming: The dry season, during which nothing can be grown, has already begun.

With a sad note in his voice Bro. Moacir adds “We know without our help, many children will starve.” ♦







# Celebrating 60 Years

Highlands  
Pioneering Pastor,  
Fr. Joseph Bisson SVD

*By John E. Happ*

**This past Feb. 2 marked the 60th anniversary since the ordination of Father Joseph Bisson SVD, missionary to the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea. Throughout his years Fr. Bisson brought schools, irrigation, electricity—as well as the word of God—to the people of the Highlands.**

**A**s an athletic young man in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston, 13-year-old Joseph Bisson first heard about New Guinea when a Divine Word Missionary priest visited his school. With stories about his experiences during World War II, the visitor aroused wonder and amazement in the boys of Joseph's seventh-grade class.

At the outbreak the war, 200 Divine Word Missionaries were teaching and building communities in New Guinea. The visiting priest told how he and many of his fellow missionaries had been captured and held prisoner by the Imperial Japanese Army in 1942. They were freed by American G.I.s in 1944.





***At Left: Students in ceremonial dress***

***Below: Students use flash cards in classroom***



The visitor's stories of mission work during the war inspired young Joseph to enter the seminary in 1949. After years of studies and field training to become a missionary priest—including instruction in anthropology and linguistics and a master's degree in education—Fr. Bisson was ordained on Feb. 2, 1963, at Techny, Illinois. He asked to serve in New Guinea as a mission priest. A year later, he arrived at Mount Hagen when he was 28 years old.

At first he had nothing to work with except the natural blessings of the fertile soil of the Western Highlands. Fr. Bisson tells stories of how he soon afterward started receiving goods left behind by the American G.I.s following the war. Years after the Japanese surrender at Wewak in September 1945, the American "liquidation committee" allowed missionaries such as Fr. Bisson to take surplus refrigerators, medicines, generators—even an ice cream machine—up to Mount Hagen.

Fr. Bisson's community even received a water-wheel to power a generator, creating the first ever source of electricity in the remote Highlands. Fr. Bisson himself later "inherited" a U.S. military Jeep that he restored and maintained throughout his years.



***Above: Fr. Joe fixing a generator and getting help from his dog***





***At Left: Students loading oil barrels in to the truck***

***Below: Fr. Joe fixing a Jeep***



The mechanical skills that served Fr. Bisson so well in Papua New Guinea were present early in his life. “When I was growing up in Jamaica Plain, all the kids brought their bikes to me to be fixed—their chains, their sprockets, grease,” he says. “By the time I got to Mount Hagen I was a carpenter, a plumber and electrician. ... Nobody else could do these things.”

During his many years in Papua New Guinea, Fr. Bisson’s work was aided by highly educated lay missionaries serving as teachers and nurses, as builders and civil engineers. More volunteers came from every walk of life. Teachers were educated in Port Moresby and then sent to the Western Highlands to teach in mission schools.

Fr. Bisson and the many lay missionaries touched the lives of hundreds and hundreds throughout Western Highlands communities. Students from Highlands mission schools have gone on to become educators themselves, even lawyers and political

***Below: Fr. Joe mixing concrete***



leaders, including the Madang-based journalist Dr. Kevin Pamba (who now teaches at Divine Word University) and former Papua New Guinea prime minister Paias Wingti.

For his dedication to his mission country, in 2017 Fr. Bisson was named a Companion to the Star of Melanesia, a high honor signed by Queen Elizabeth II and awarded for “distinguished service of a high degree to Papua New Guinea” over a period of 15 years. He was singled out for bringing education, health care and pastoral care to the people of the Highlands. ♦

*John E. Happ is the author of “The Navigation Case,” a non-fiction account of the New Guinea campaign during World War II. His father, Len Happ, served in the U.S. Army Air Forces stationed in New Guinea from 1943 to 1944.*

*For more information, visit [www.johnhappusa.com](http://www.johnhappusa.com)*



***Above: Fr. Joe hauling the water tank***



***Left: 2017 Fr. Bisson was named a Companion to the Star of Melanesia, a high honor signed by Queen Elizabeth II and awarded for “distinguished service of a high degree to Papua New Guinea”***





# Easter Vigil in Wirui, Papua New Guinea

*By Bishop Jozef Roszynski SVD*



**E**aster Vigil in Wirui is a very interesting celebration. It starts with the blessing of new fire representing Jesus rising from the darkness of the tomb to life eternal. Several Bible readings bring us into the history of salvation, and the joyful Alleluia lets us know we are in the New Covenant.

Blessing of the water and baptism of the catechumens follow. Celebration of the Eucharist is the summit of the vigil, and receiving Holy Communion binds oneself with Christ, who promised in John 6:51: "I am the living bread which has come from heaven; whoever eats of this bread will live forever. The bread I shall give is my flesh and I will give it for the life of the world."

**Hallelujah, Jesus Christ is Risen!**



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