News

Basilian Sr. Lucia Murashko talks with volunteers Denys Kuprikov, left, and Ivan Smyglia, far right, in Zaporizhzhia in southeast Ukraine Feb. 7 about where they will distribute humanitarian aid along the front in Russia's war against Ukraine. (OSV News/CNEWA/Konstantin Chernichkin)

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September 28, 2023
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An order of women religious has been recognized for extraordinary efforts to bring Jesus Christ to those suffering the ravages of Russia's war in Ukraine.

Catholic Extension has named the Sisters of the Order of St. Basil the Great as the 2023-2024 recipients of its highest honor, the Lumen Christi Award. The Chicago-based nonprofit, which since 1905 has supported Catholic faith communities in the nation's poorest regions, announced the decision in a Sept. 27 press release.

Taking its name from the Latin words for "light of Christ," the Lumen Christi Award affirms those who radiate and reveal Christ's love where they serve.

The Basilian Sisters will receive $25,000 to support their ministry among the poor and suffering in Ukraine. The Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia — whose Metropolitan Archbishop Borys Gudziak nominated the order — also will receive $25,000, as the sisters' Jesus, Lover of Humanity Province in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, has been based within the archeparchy for more than a century.

The sisters were chosen from nominations submitted to Catholic Extension by 41 dioceses. Six other finalists each received $10,000 to support their ministries.

Basilian Sr. Joann Sosler, provincial superior of the Jesus, Lover of Humanity Province, described the award as a "tremendous gift" that "recognizes our sisters' ministry to Ukrainian war victims who have been displaced in both Europe and the United States.

"It is a sign from God that our work is important and must continue," she said.

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Gudziak told OSV News that "for centuries (the sisters') prayer, ministry to the poor and those in need, and ... educational activity have been a mainstay of Ukrainian

society both at home and abroad."

He also pointed to the sisters' work with addicted persons in Philadelphia's Kensington neighborhood, which has been an epicenter of the opioid crisis, while noting their courage in ministering to soldiers and civilians in Ukraine.

"The relief they offer to thousands of refugees here in Philadelphia and their courageous presence in some of the most pressing humanitarian hotspots in Ukraine during this devastating war deserve our respect and emulation," he said.

The Basilian Sisters — who have communities in the U.S. and the order's native Ukraine, as well as Argentina, Croatia, Poland, Romania and Slovakia — have become known for their tireless efforts to aid Ukrainian refugees and internally displaced persons, amid Russia's brutal full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Located less than 40 miles from the war's front lines, the Basilian monastery in Zaporizhzhia has sheltered women, children and battle-weary soldiers, while the sisters regularly travel to villages in combat zones to bring food, water, clothing and other supplies.

Basilian Sr. Lucia Murashko, who serves at that monastery, said she and her fellow sisters "decided what we have to do is help those who are most in need."

Speaking to OSV News Sept. 27, Sosler said the award funds will support both the order's ongoing ministries in the U.S. and Ukraine, and also help renovate its first monastery — located in Slovita, Ukraine — as an assisted living facility for the elderly.

"We'll be opening it up to about 10 to 12 couples and individuals," she said, noting that the sisters are resolutely moving forward with the project despite Russia's attacks, which have seen "missiles hit other buildings" in the region.

Catholic Extension president Fr. Jack Wall said the sisters' "perseverance, courage and joyful spirits amid such peril is a powerful witness of faith that we are honored to recognize through this award."

"The source of our light is Him. It's Jesus, and He just works," said Murashko in the Catholic Extension press release. "You just have to follow Him."

This story appears in the **Hope Amid Turmoil: Sisters in Conflict Areas** feature series. View the full series.