News
Religious Life



Basilian Sister Lucia Murashko talks with volunteers Denys Kuprikov, left, and Ivan Smyglia, far right, in Zaporizhzhia in southeast Ukraine Feb. 7, 2023, where they planned to distribute humanitarian aid along the front in Russia's war against Ukraine. As Russia relentlessly strikes civilian targets in its invasion of Ukraine, Sister Lucia told OSV News she, her fellow sisters and some 80 children narrowly missed a recent strike on the city of Zaporizhzhia. (OSV News/Konstantin Chernichkin, CNEWA)

Gina Christian

View Author Profile

OSV News

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Near Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine — December 13, 2024

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Basilan Sisters and some 80 children in the Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia narrowly avoided being killed in a deadly Dec. 6 strike by Russia, as they celebrated a liturgy marking the feast of St. Nicholas.

"We were praying during the liturgy in our monastery," Basilian Sister Lucia Murashko told OSV News in messages on Dec. 8 and 10 following the attack, which killed 10 and wounded more than 20.

Sister Lucia said the Ukrainian Catholic liturgy, which took place the evening of Dec. 6 in the sisters' monastery chapel, was conducted in the dark due to scheduled power blackouts necessitated by Russia's relentless targeting of Ukraine's energy grid.

"Three to six hours every day, they switch off the lights in the city" at varying times, Sister Lucia told OSV News.

Despite the blackout, said Sister Lucia, the children were excited to honor the beloved fourth-century saint's day, which in 2023 was moved from the traditional Dec. 19 to Dec. 6 as part of a shift by the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to the revised Julian calendar.

"We give them small presents, sweets and fruits and so on," she said. "And the children were (performing) in a play about the life of St. Nicholas, a traditional play for children."

In addition, "the children prayed to St. Nicholas" — but not for "gifts like smartphones or gadgets," said Sister Lucia.

"They pray for their father who is a soldier, that he can come back home and healthy. They pray for the health of their brother," she said.

But amid the prayers, a sudden — and sinister — light appeared, said Sister Lucia. In the darkness, "we saw it very brightly," she said. "At first, we saw the light explode, and then after a few seconds, we heard the sound of the explosion."

Advertisement

The blast "was very close to us," she said.

"It was very hard, because many people died, and people (were) burned (alive) in their cars because they were stopped at a light," said Sister Lucia.

None of those in the monastery at the time were killed, but some of the victims were family friends of some of the children, she said.

"One of our young people — two of his father's friends were burned in their car at a red light," she said. "The explosion happened on the next street. They were 27 years old.

"It is not easy even to tell these stories," she said.

Sister Lucia noted that Russia's Dec. 10 strike on Zaporizhzhia — which killed at least 6 and wounded 22, while destroying a clinic — had taken place less than an hour prior to her message to OSV News that day.

"Again, people have died," she said. "Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy on us."

Russia's war on Ukraine, which continues attacks launched in 2014 and escalated in 2022, has been declared a genocide in two joint reports from the New Lines Institute and the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights.

This story appears in the **War in Ukraine** feature series. View the full series.