**MESSAGE FROM SR. HANNAH RITA LAUE, OP – RIGA, LATVIA**

Dear Sisters,

At our convent in Riga we are three Sisters. We are used to having student girls and volunteers living with us. But since St. Joseph´s Day we have seven people from Ukraine living at our place together with the usual inhabitants. And we are preparing for more. As in Riga all beds are full, we will take in nine more people, but we will do so step by step.

On the 20th we received a big transport with clothing, bedclothes, toys etc. This transport normally arrives around this time of the year, and we distribute it four days long. This time we will connect with the official refugee-center that organises the refugees’ registration, to invite them to come over. Our volunteers will guarantee a shuttle from the city-center to our place, so people will have no trouble reaching us. We have a very committed team of parish-women organizing the unpacking, sorting, assisting to find the right things and packing up the rest, which we normally bring to the countryside parishes in need. When this is done we can open that part of the house for five people. And when on April 10th our little retreat house is free again, we can take in the other four people.

Even if some of them are already working and for this can afford to "pay" something, we see the need for donations to handle the costs for heating, electricity and water, as the prices are exploding. So if there is a way to help financially, we would be happy. We are using our German account for the donations:

**Account Holder: Dominikanerinnen von Bethanien e.V.
Address: Ungerather Str. 1-15
 41366 Schwalmtal/Waldniel Germany**
**IBAN: DE 6147 2603 0700 2145 0001 BIC: GENODEM1BKC**

 **Bank für Kirche und Caritas**

**Address: Kamp 17, 33098 Paderborn, Germany**

It seems we have a sponsor (but we have no clear commitment yet) for the equipment needed: washing machine, two fridges and three mini-ovens... That is great! So we can separate some territories from each other to reduce tension by giving private space. Just because you are stuck together at the same place (no matter how welcoming) that doesn´t mean that you like each other! And all of them are terrified thinking of their loved ones, traumatized by their different experiences of running or being unable to return home as planned, having their dads and sons in Kyiv or Charkiw… fighting, helping the injured... and their mothers and sisters on the run to other countries... Their souls need a savf space for private grief and rest.

Today one lady of our parish offered her professional help as a psychologist for free for all the people we take in. We are very touched by this. The people bring basic food and try to include some extras like a huge fruit basket. We want to invite the parish people over for tea, so our new guests can get to know us all, and we them. Some neighbours, who normally keep their distance said they hope to be invited too. So the Holy Spirit is doing extra shifts...

We are preparing our basement as well. Slowly, trying not to overreact, but we are preparing to have extra water, some food, candles, a cooking option running without electricity, and the material we need to protect the windows. So we will be able to be down there with everybody for a little while. Better we have it and never need it than to be sorry...

We feel the strength of having a family that cares, of being united in prayers and of being together in being there for the ones in need!

Thank you very much, we keep you all in our prayers. May St. Joseph, patron saint of our convent keep all of us safe.

Love, and many greetings to you, from all of us,

Sr. Hannah Rita