



Read by: Friar Mike Lasky, OFM Conv.
FAN Lenten Series 2023

Prologue

I am part of a Franciscan team, who offered a *Social Theater Training*, teaching Ukrainian actors and actresses' new skills, so that they might better help those suffering from war trauma.

Under the frescoed ceiling of a tired Polish train station, I met for the first time, two Mary's, Masha & Maria.

Masha seeing my Franciscan Habit immediately greeted me with a hug. Maria, a step or two behind, offered a smile with a deliberate nod of the head.

Within the hearts of Masha & Maria there was a hope, that through our time together, they would learn how to focus their knowledge and love of theatre into a means of bringing some healing to their people back home.

This is part of a
Social Theatre Script...the two Mary's are writing...
...with a cast of Ukrainian refugees.

I would entitle their play: *Ukrainian Hearts of Hope*

Act 1

Masha returned home to Vinnytsia, Ukraine, where she now runs a weekly inter-generational social theatre program, for forcibly resettled women, ranging in age from 17 to 70.

Because the women are from a Russian speaking part of the east, Masha's workshops teach public speaking to assist them in feeling more comfortable in conversational Ukrainian.

This has led to participants relating better with their new neighbors, while also boosting their confidence in seeking employment.

Act 2

As word of Masha's work spread, she was soon asked to become the director of social theatre at a local university.

Here her leadership program teaches young adults the importance of being responsible for one another and the strangers in their midst.

Assisted by psychologists, many of the participants are processing their war trauma for the first time...

Act 3

Masha's heart discerned the need to address the psychological and emotional difficulties being experienced by resettled kids from the east, ages 6-12.

During these workshops a problem revealed itself, as it became evident that the refugee children and local children were not speaking to one another.

So, with a holy flexibility, Masha adjusted her program to include all of the children.

To provide a neutral ground for the kids to positively interact, she began taking them on field trips to local cultural museums.

For both children and their parents,
Dostoevsky's words ring true... *"beauty will save the world"*.

Act 4

Now we shift in setting, to the Capitol of Kyiv.

Here Maria began a social theatre group in a school, for kids ages 13 to 16.

Like the other Mary, Maria was helping children who were feeling lost and afraid.

Maria soon discovered within herself a creativity that was encouraged in our Franciscan training back in Poland, where all the participants were reminded to work with their surroundings.

While Maria's classes usually take place in a school classroom, when the sirens sound due to frequent air raids in Kyiv, everyone must move underground.

Maria's holy flexibility brings a dramatic light of hope to the basement of the school, where she continues her classes by including everyone, thereby pushing the sounds of the sirens to the background.

Act 5

Maria also discerned within her heart, a need to travel east to the recently liberated city of Kharkiv.

The Russian retreat left a wake of destruction, both physically and emotionally.

Here Maria organized a dramatic Christmas pageant based on social theatre, during which she and her collaborators were able to give gifts to the children of the bombed-out city.

Talking with the parents, Maria learned the stories of these children and their families...

...They lived in basements for months during the shelling...

...They are still trying to figure out which of their relatives might have died, and who might have gone through the Russian "filtration" camps to survive.

Through this program Maria countered the darkness of fear and loss, by lighting a flicker of Christian hope in the hearts of so many.

Epilogue

To learn more about our Franciscan Social Theatre Project in response to the War in Ukraine:

Please visit **FranciscanVoice.org** and click on the link for Peace & Justice.
