



the story of how a prayer vigil for Ukraine at the Cathedral grew from an

Spencer Mulholland

A couple of days after the invasion on February 24, a local Ukrainian woman named Olga approached us to ask if she could hold an event in support of her homeland in the Cathedral grounds. We were all shocked at what had happened, and Olga's passion for her country and grave concern for family and friends in Ukraine, along with her strong determination to do something public, moved me.

The vigil was to be the next day, on the Sunday at lunchtime, so we had 24 hours to work out what to do. We agreed to meet on the Green, after morning services, and then go inside to one of the side chapels for a moment of prayer, following which everyone could light a candle.

It felt important to me that the "moment" was as personal as possible, and so I asked Olga if there was anything she would like to include.

She asked if her husband Taras could read a poem composed by her mother-in-law, who lives just 30 miles behind the current front line, and that I say "Mi molimosya za Ukrainy," which means "We pray for Ukraine".

Olga publicised the short service with her contacts on social media, and we were told to expect about 30 to 40 people.



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When I walked out on to the Green on the Sunday, the number of people who had turned up was astonishing. There were hundreds and the whole green was full.

Normally such a large gathering or service would take weeks to plan and require many volunteer stewards and others to manage.

There were just three vergers on duty. Phoning ahead as the crowd grew, I asked the vergers to move the service into the Cathedral nave, then we led Olga and the crowd of, by then, around 600, inside.

The prayerful, spiritual atmosphere helped focus our collective sense of respect and solidarity, as everyone took their places.

With the poem and prayers, the service lasted only about 10 minutes, but it was powerful. After the welcome, prayers and Taras' poem, when Olga and her children lit a large candle to symbolise all our thoughts and prayers, the gathering broke into spontaneous applause and everyone rose to their feet. A standing ovation for Ukraine.

It was very good to welcome members of the wider community, including our regular congregations, and it felt absolutely right for all of us, of all ages, nationalities and backgrounds to be there in the Cathedral to pray and stand alongside our Ukrainian friends.

(Revd Canon Anna Macham is pictured above, looking on as Olga lights a candle for Ukraine)

More information:

- Christians from across the UK and Ireland will be [joining in prayer for Ukraine](https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/stories-blogs-and-features/we-expected-40-our-ukraine-prayer-vigil-instead-600) on Sunday April 3.