

Published March 16th, 2022

Lamorinda residents gather for 'Vigil for Peace in Ukraine'

By Vera Kochan



A Ukrainian flag with "Peace" written on it stands near the top of the hill behind Lafayette Mayor Teresa Gerringer, who speaks to residents at the March 6 vigil. Photo Vera Kochan

Perched near the crest of the hill stands a large wooden Ukrainian flag with the word "Peace" written on it.

The hour-long vigil was a somber occasion, more so for this reporter who is a first-generation Ukrainian American with family members still living there. LHM Board Members Janet Thomas, her husband Ramsay, and Kay James spoke briefly, and Lynn MacMichael read a poem by Fred Norman; Lafayette Mayor Teresa Gerringer announced that city council members voted unanimously to fly the Ukrainian flag in Plaza Park to show support for the Ukrainian people; John Lennon's song "Imagine" was played during a moment of silence and reflection; followed by a closing prayer from Pastor Dan Senter of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Lafayette. Every now and then a passing car would honk its horn in solidarity.

The crowd was made up of people who had varying reasons for being there. While all came to show their support, a few had personal reasons for attending. Liz from Lafayette, who asked that we not use his last name, has a son who works for the United Nations and is currently in Kyiv, Ukraine's capital. His wife is Ukrainian, but has fled to Switzerland with their children for safety (it is the reason their names are being omitted from this article). A Ukrainian woman cried as she told this reporter that her mother is still there, and we hugged through tears with the mutual understanding of people who share the same pain that only those living through it can begin to comprehend.

Still others, with no Ukrainian family ties but a compassion for its beleaguered people, felt compelled to join the vigil. "I am here in Lafayette at the crosses to support my friends who are Ukrainian," stated Moraga Council Member Teresa Onoda. "It breaks my heart -- what they're going through." Added LHM Board Member and Lafayette Council Member Gina Dawson, "We're very glad to make the opportunity to have a vigil where people can come out and support the people of Ukraine."

Those who have family in Ukraine who attended the Lafayette vigil said that the overwhelming support from gestures such as this, no matter how big or small, do not go unnoticed and are more appreciated than words can say.

For anyone wishing to make a donation to help in the humanitarian aid for Ukrainian people, included is a list of reputable charitable organizations:

NOVA Ukraine (based in Palo Alto, CA): <https://NOVAUkraine.org>

International Committee of the Red Cross: <https://www.icrc.org/en/donate/ukraine>

UNICEF: <https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/en>

World Central Kitchen: <https://donate.wck.org>

Catholic Relief Services: <https://www.crs.org/>

Doctors Without Borders: <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/>

Sponsored by The Lafayette Hillside Memorial (formerly known as the Crosses of Lafayette), a solemn gathering of approximately 70 Lamorinda residents came together in solidarity to participate in the March 6 "Vigil for Peace in Ukraine."

According to the LHM website, the hillside across from the BART station is a "sacred place of reflection and remembrance; a protest against forgetting. It is a place to recognize, honor, and commemorate individual national service contributions. The memorial is also a place that encourages individual and public reflection on those contributions, and the otherwise unintended, unseen, and unexamined costs of war."

The crosses and other symbols representing various religions first began appearing on the hill in 2006, keeping a devastating tally of American service members killed in combat. As of Feb. 24, the nearly 8,000 wooden monuments serve a new meaning: to remind anyone passing by that Russian forces had invaded Ukraine.

International Medical Corps: <https://internationalmedicalcorps.org/>

International Rescue Committee: <https://www.rescue.org/>

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