
Germany: Polina, a Ukrainian refugee, now a young altar server in a Rhineland parish

The website of the German Catholic Church, katholisch.de, regularly covers the ecclesial experiences of the refugees who arrive in Germany. Today, it is the case of a twenty-year-old girl, Polina Yukhymovych, a Ukrainian refugee of the Catholic Roman rite who has been homed with her mother in St Anne's Parish in Ratingen, near Düsseldorf, in Northern Rhine-Westphalia. The experience of gratitude in faith and the discovery of being able to serve at Church as an acolyte are making her feel more and more of a member of the community. In Polina's home church in Vorzel, a town close to Kiev, the capital of Ukraine, girls are not allowed to be altar servers: "only boys can, in our church", Polina says. The priest of her parish church once told her that it was not a feminine role, but she recently told him that now she is an altar girl in Germany: "Go on", he replied. And Polina goes on, grateful for the invitation she received from St Anne's community, that proposed her to help at the altar. Polina fled Ukraine in April 2022 with her mum. First, she was temporarily homed in Poland, then a friend contacted her mother. "She has been living in Germany for a long time and invited her to hers", recalls the girl, who has been living in Ratingen since then. "We are lucky", she says. Her father and her elder brother are still in Ukraine, because only men aged 65 or older, who have at least three children or have to take care of relatives who are already abroad can leave the country. Since she has been living in Ratingen, Polina has been involved in youth work, helping at communal parties, helping Ukrainian children as a volunteer, and studying German so she can work. She dreams of opening a restaurant. But "war is terrible", Polina says, and her Vorzel home is no longer there.

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