

**Address by the Chair of the
Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain,
Petro Rewko MBE**

**VE Day 80, St James's Church, Paddington, London
8 May 2025**

Your Excellencies, Reverend Fathers, esteemed guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Firstly, may I pass on sincere greetings from the President of the Ukrainian World Congress, Mr Pavlo Grod, and the President of the European Congress of Ukrainians, Mr Bohdan Rajcinec, who I also have the honour of representing here today.

We have gathered here today in St James's Church in a historic moment as we commemorate the 80th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day, a day that resonates deeply within our hearts and minds.

Today, we are privileged to witness the long-awaited blessing of this stained glass window, a tribute dedicated to the brave Ukrainian-Canadian servicemen and the courageous Ukrainians who served in the Polish Armed Forces under British command during the Second World War.

This window, which was so beautifully designed, created and installed five years ago by Glenn Carter, serves as a powerful symbol of remembrance, gratitude, light, life and optimism. It stands as a testament to the sacrifices made by those who fought valiantly for our freedom and peace. Through the collaboration of St James's Church, the organisation that I represent – the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain – and our partners in Canada, we felt it important to honour not only the fallen, but also those who played a vital role in resettling tens of thousands of displaced Ukrainians in the aftermath of the war. Their resilience and commitment laid the groundwork for the foundation of the Association of Ukrainians, fostering a vibrant community that continues to thrive today.

Originally planned for the 75th anniversary of VE Day, when we worked so closely with this Church and the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Foundation, the blessing ceremony was postponed due to COVID and then the war in Ukraine. Indeed, who could have imagined even five years ago that our present day generation would find itself following in the footsteps of our predecessors to play a similarly critical role in helping to resettle tens of thousands of Ukrainians displaced as a result of Russia's ongoing horrific war against Ukraine.

However, today we embrace the opportunity to reflect on the past and reaffirm our commitment to the values of courage, unity, and hope.

We extend our eternal gratitude to St James's Church, its Standing Committee and Parochial Church Council – and of course to Fr Owen and Fr Tim – for approving the initial proposal and their very kind collaboration throughout.

As we bless this window, I am reminded of Glenn Carter's words when he set out his design: *"The passage at the base of the window alludes to Matthew's gospel, chapter 25, verses 35-40. 'I was a stranger and you gave me shelter'. This wording develops the breadth of kindness, the care given, and the support undertaken at Sussex Gardens during and after World War II".*

But may this window also remind us of the sacrifices made for our shared freedom and the enduring spirit of those who served. May it illuminate our path as we remember the past and strive for a better future filled with compassion and understanding.

Let us honour the memory of those who we remember today by carrying forward their legacy in our hearts and our actions.

Thank you!