

Peculiarities of the military chaplaincy of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine in the conditions of modern war

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The article examines the features of military chaplaincy of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine in the context of the war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. The structures of these Churches that are responsible for the military chaplaincy and have already gained successful experience in such activities during the war (from 2014 to the present day) are identified. The forms of training of military chaplains are determined: these are courses organized at state military higher educational institutions, trainings and classes (including ones in the self-organized School of Chaplaincy Service in the RCC) on psychological, legal, socio-humanitarian and medical issues, which complement church education and are necessary during the war both in the army when providing chaplaincy care, and in the rear – for pastoral support of veterans, wounded servicemen, and relatives of servicemen. The peculiarities of the approach to candidates for chaplaincy are highlighted: the approach of the RCC in Ukraine is that they can be secular, including women (nuns and laywomen), and they are also invited for appropriate training; the UGCC is working on a more active involvement of nuns in the chaplaincy mission. A patriotic approach to chaplaincy service has been noted not only in the UGCC, but also in the RCC in Ukraine, whose Ukrainian-centricity has been strengthened by the modern war. The forms of presentation of the instructions of military chaplains, which are addressed to the believers and all defenders of the Fatherland, are determined: they are carried out both in direct communication with soldiers and their loved ones, and in printed publications for military personnel, defenders of Ukraine: “Catechism of the Christian Warrior” (UGCC) and “Pray and Protect!” (RCC). It was found that the military chaplaincy of the UGCC and the RCC actively uses innovations, i.e. modern information and communication tools (social networks and mobile applications).

KEYWORDS

military chaplaincy, Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine, Ukraine, war.

Introduction

The need for military chaplains among Ukrainian soldiers has been convincingly proven in practice during the current war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. At the same time, practice has shown that family members of military personnel, especially those who are in captivity, missing, maimed and wounded, also need support. Military chaplains have to not only comfort soldiers at the front, but also convey tragic news to their relatives, help them and their sworn brothers cope with difficult worldview and spiritual issues on the verge of life and death, about their meaning, about the place of God in everything that happens. The service of military chaplains is multifaceted, and the study of all its aspects helps to understand possible ways of retaining human values amid trials and horrors of war. A correspondingly large research field has opened up for religious scholars. In this field, there are many topical

gaps: in particular, the analysis of the features of military chaplaincy of specific Churches.

Research methodology and historiography

The research methodology is based on the use of a number of general scientific methods and special methodological techniques. The method of source analysis and content analysis was used in the selection and processing of the source base of the study: original church documents (Resolutions, Appeals, messages of official church media resources, catechetical publications), as well as interviews with church figures. The method of comparative analysis was used in determining and comparing the features of the organization of military chaplaincy in the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (hereinafter – the UGCC) and the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine (hereinafter – the RCC in Ukraine), the training and activities of their chaplains. The method of included observation was used in available field

studies (pastoral care of families of soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine by military chaplains), the generalization method was used in formulating the conclusions of the work. The author's a priori confessional neutrality allowed her to strictly adhere to the principles of scientific objectivity and tolerance, while academic integrity and the application of the currently relevant contextual methodological approach allowed her to adhere to the principle of assessing the phenomena under study in light of Ukrainian nation-state interests.

The issues of military chaplaincy in independent Ukraine were paid attention to by our colleagues S. Zdiork, V. Yelensky, O. Sagan and others. With the beginning of the Russian Federation's military actions against Ukraine in 2014, such studies naturally became more active. In the context of this investigation, it is appropriate to especially highlight the work of O. Sagan (2023), who analyzed the conceptual issues and stages of the formation of military chaplaincy in Ukraine after gaining its independence. Among the works devoted to certain aspects of the service of military chaplains, we would like to note the analysis of the modern media tools of chaplains carried out by O. Kostyuk, O. Predko and D. Predko (2023). The articles on the content of the activities of military chaplains referred to representatives of various Churches. It is especially worth focusing on the studies of scholars who studied the previous contribution of the Churches: the service of chaplains of the UGCC in the 20th century — L. Fedyk (2014) and V. Birchak (2018), the mission of "Maidan" chaplains of the UGCC and the RCC in Ukraine — O. Nedavnya (2014), M. Dolganova and I. Chobit (2022). The relevant experience of the RCC clergy from the Maidan to the ATO was also highlighted by N. Mosyukova, T. Gavrilyuk and M. Lukashenko (2017). I. Lomachynska and O. Alekseenko (2024) rightly emphasized the patriotic orientation of the UGCC, which actively supported the idea of creating a national army. Therefore, given the legacy of this Church, it is natural that its chaplains were among the first to carry out their service among Ukrainian soldiers on a volunteer basis since 2014. However, less is known about the contemporary activities of chaplains from the RCC in Ukraine.

The purpose, tasks and scientific novelty

The author gratefully relies on everything developed on this topic by colleagues, at the same time it should be noted: the study of the current stage of the service of military chaplains of individual Churches, in particular the UGCC and the RCC in Ukraine, is just beginning. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to establish the features of the military chaplaincy of the named Churches in the circumstances of the ongoing war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which constitutes the scientific novelty of the study. Accordingly, the research tasks were: to clarify the Greek and Roman Catholic church structures responsible for military chaplaincy; to determine the forms of training of military chaplains, to outline the composition of their contingent and presentation of the instructions of the military pastors; to identify the innovative tools of military chaplains.

Results and Discussion

In the UGCC, military chaplains are cared for by the Department of Military Chaplaincy of the Patriarchal Curia of this Church, which is an auxiliary body under the Head of the UGCC and the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC in the field of pastoral care of servicemen of the Armed Forces

and other military formations of Ukraine, as well as members of their families. (*Department, 2025*)

In the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine, the Military Chaplaincy Commission, which has the similar tasks, deals with military chaplaincy issues (*Commissions, 2025*). This Commission operates under the Conference of Roman Catholic Bishops of Ukraine, which unites the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine. In the localities, in the Lviv Archdiocese and dioceses, corresponding pastoral departments have been created (*Military, 2025*).

The pastoral presence of priests of the UGCC and the RCC in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, which existed before 2014, is being expanded since the beginning of the armed invasion by Russia. At first, priests could go to the military on a volunteer basis, while some, remaining parish priests, periodically visited military units. The Official Report of the XI All-Ukrainian Conference of Military Chaplains on the Status of a Military Chaplain in the UGCC states:

"In 2014, the need for the presence of priests in the military became particularly acute. Therefore, at the request of the state, the Church began to officially send priests to military formations for pastoral service to Ukrainian servicemen. Already in 2016, a regulatory and legal framework was developed to regulate the interaction between the Church and the military, which, in particular, provided for granting official status to the military chaplaincy. Thus, a military chaplain became a full-time employee in military formations, educational and medical institutions." (*Official, 2017*)

The mission of military chaplains is complex and responsible, so it requires both a spiritual vocation and special training. Both the UGCC and the RCC in Ukraine are developing a system of preparation for military chaplaincy service, which has a number of features and includes various stages.

The UGCC was involved in the first attempts after 2014 to organize training for military chaplains: in particular, in the special courses for clergy of different denominations who work in the army, initiated in Kyiv by the All-Ukrainian Christian-Religious Interdenominational Military Brotherhood. The course program included the study of military history, military psychology, etc.

The training was and is an integral part of the annual gatherings of military chaplains of the UGCC (*Priest-military, 2021*), initiated by the Department of Military Chaplaincy of the UGCC (First All-Ukrainian Congress of Chief Military Chaplains of this Church was held in December 2007, the eighteenth one — in 2024). It includes various areas: historical and educational, legal, social and psychological issues, various trainings necessary for military chaplains, including the acquisition of practical skills in war. For example, in December 2015, as part of the IX All-Ukrainian Congress of Military Chaplains of the UGCC, participants underwent training in the basics of tactical medicine *Rescuer Fighter Course*. This course consisted of the necessary theoretical part, analysis of video materials, and practice of the algorithm for providing first aid. The training took place in full equipment in conditions and situations that were as close to real ones as possible, so the chaplains could apply the theoretical knowledge they had gained in practice regarding examining the injured and providing the necessary first aid on the battlefield. (*Military, 2016*)

Subsequently, military chaplains of the UGCC and the RCC in Ukraine studied at various courses at state institutions and higher educational institutions. For example, in February 2017, military chaplain courses were held at the Petro Sahaidachny National Academy of the Land Forces in Lviv. For two weeks, representatives of all confessions

that are members of the Council for Pastoral Care under the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine discussed the issues that arise during the work of chaplains in the army and studied foreign experience of serving priests in the Armed Forces. (*Participants, 2017*). The *Basic Training Course for Military Priests (Chaplains) of the Armed Forces of Ukraine* was held in August 2018 in Odessa. It took place at the Military Academy of the Land Forces and at a military training ground. (*Chaplaincy, 2018*)

After 2022, training of military chaplains, in particular from the UGCC and the RCC in Ukraine, was organized at the state level: on the basis of the Military Institute of the Taras Shevchenko National University in Kyiv. On February 20, 2023, the training of the first 30 military chaplains from 5 religious organizations started there, and in February 2025, the ninth two-month advanced training course for tactical-level officers on military chaplaincy was opened. (*The 9th set, 2025*).

In October 2022, the RCC in Ukraine organized its own School of Chaplaincy to give chaplains the basic tools for effective service to the military, as well as to their families and those who lost their loved ones in the war. Bishop Pavlo Honcharuk, head of the Military Pastoral Commission of this Church and before his episcopal ordination, a military chaplain himself, recalls:

“When I was appointed responsible for the Military Pastoral Commission, the war that began in 2014 was already underway... I talked with chaplains and other military personnel, and with psychologists. I came to understanding that it was necessary to train chaplains. Because training in the seminary did not take into account that a priest would serve during hostilities or during wartime. There were some superficial issues, but for the most part these were issues of service in peacetime. Instead, the war that engulfed our country in full scale posed new challenges, new questions for us and for priests in particular. We must be ready and be able to competently answer these questions. Taking into account all these needs, the School of Chaplaincy was organized... Priests study subjects that they already know from the seminary, but there are also additional ones — the basics of international humanitarian law, tactical medicine, the history of Ukraine, extended psychology. All these subjects are needed so that a priest has a broader view, remembers the necessary things, and prepares to serve different people (non-believers, representatives of other religions).” (*Bishop Honcharuk, 2023*).

Therefore, the School of Chaplaincy offers a basic training and formation course for the modern preparation of military chaplains. A feature of this Church’s approach — both to the training of chaplains and to the identification of possible candidates for the important mission of a military chaplain — is inviting to the training and mission both clergy and lay believers. It is recognized that both clergy and laity can perform chaplaincy in units of the Armed Forces, the National Guard, other military formations established in accordance with the laws of Ukraine, in the State Border Service of Ukraine, in military educational institutions, hospitals, in territories covered by war, as well as in parish pastoral care to provide assistance to all categories of the population affected by military actions. During their studies, students of this School undergo theoretical and practical training in theological, philosophical and psychological disciplines, the history of Ukraine, international humanitarian law, tactical medicine and physical training, which will help them effectively perform the ministry of a chaplain in the future. The first session, which was attended by 30 priests, took place at the Institute of Theological Sciences in Khmelnytskyi Region (*The School, 2022*), and since then the school has been actively working.

The Secretary-Spokesperson of the Conference of Roman Catholic Bishops of Ukraine, Bishop Edward Kava, ascertains the practical approach of the Church and high confidence in the possibilities of spiritual service of the laity of the RCC in his comment on military chaplains not only from the clergy, but also from the laity:

“The episcopate approved this form of service, because there are many lay people who have been accompanying the military in Eastern Ukraine for eight years (Anti-terrorist operation), have appropriate training and have undergone formation, so they can also be chaplains... A chaplain is a servant, not necessarily a priest.” (*Bishop Kava, 2022*).

Moreover: the practice of military chaplaincy has shown that there is also a need for special courses for women, because servicewomen, women of military families, and displaced women sometimes need spiritual advice and comfort from sworn sisters. So the RCC in Ukraine promptly responded with an innovative solution: at the School of Chaplaincy, they organized a recruitment of a women’s group for the «Training Course for Parish Pastoral Ministers in Wartime». The curriculum of the Course includes a theoretical part in theological and psychological disciplines, and practical trainings that will help in organizing various pastoral support for soldiers, veterans, members of their families, and all those affected by military actions. The participants of the course — women teachers, psychologists, social workers, leaders of church communities, and nuns — have part of the lectures together with a group of chaplains, and separately consider issues of working with children, integration anti-stress activities, etc. (*Gorodok, 2023*).

The UGCC is also moving in a similar direction. At the 98th session of its Synod of Bishops, the main topic of which was military chaplaincy, it was decided to address the Commission on Monastic Affairs of the UGCC with a request to initiate consideration of the issue of more active involvement of monks and nuns of the UGCC in chaplaincy service in the army (in particular, nuns — to meet the spiritual and religious needs of female military personnel, in accordance with the typicons or statutes of institutes of consecrated life. (*Resolutions, 2024*). Therefore, probably, the appropriate organization of such an innovation in the UGCC is a matter of the near future. This Church also plans to introduce the issues necessary for the training of military chaplains into the curricula of its seminaries, as the head of the Department of Military Chaplaincy of the UGCC, Bishop Bohdan Manyshyn, testified. (*He who, 2024*).

It should be noted that the modern UGCC and RCC in Ukraine operate in the field of military chaplaincy not only unanimously, but also jointly — among themselves and with other patriotically minded Churches. For example, after the creation of the Chaplaincy Service in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, a joint Appeal to the military of Ukraine of all confessions and faiths was adopted, which sets out the common moral position of this Service, which is no longer a volunteer movement, but an official institution. The Appeal, signed on behalf of the UGCC and the RCC by their authorized bishops, emphasizes: in Ukraine this is the first experience when the Church

“at the call of the soul and at the invitation of the state takes its place in the ranks with its believers during the performance of a particularly important and dangerous task. Today, more than ever, there is a need for pastoral care of the military. It is spiritual endurance and strength that make them invincible and noble in the just struggle for their land. In this difficult time for our country, we would like to assure you of our support and prayers. Military chaplains are ready to work for the Armed

Forces of Ukraine to maintain their high morale and confidence in victory." (*Address, 2017*).

It is worth paying attention to the aspect of the Ukrainian patriotism of the Churches, proven in practice: while the corresponding expectations regarding the UGCC, given its experience of participating in the national liberation struggles of the Ukrainian people, are obvious (and fully justified), the corresponding position of the RCC in Ukraine requires greater coverage and analysis. And it is the current war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine that crystallizes the Ukrainian-centricity of these Church in Ukrainian territories and stimulates the acquaintance of specialists, state and public factors with such a development of the RCC in Ukraine. Thus, from the first days of the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation, the military chaplains of the RCC in Ukraine issued an appeal:

"We assure the courageous soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine of our support in every way available to us — in prayer, word and deed. While you stand as a shield in defense of our freedom and independence, we create a prayer shield so that the Lord may protect you — sons and daughters of Ukraine — and protect your families in time of war. We bless you in defense of our Motherland! Together we will stand and repel the enemy's invasion. God is with us! We are with you in prayer, word and deed!" (*Prayer, 2022*).

The instructions of the military chaplains of the UGCC and the RCC in Ukraine, as well as the corresponding position of these Churches, are reflected in their catechetical publications for Ukrainian soldiers. In 2020, the RCC in Ukraine published a pocket prayer book for a serviceman "Pray and Protect!" It was compiled by military chaplains of the Lviv Archdiocese as spiritual help and support for soldiers-defenders of Ukraine. The chief military chaplain of this archdiocese, Father Ivan Zayats, testified that this is the first such prayer book for servicemen from the RCC in Ukraine. It has a convenient compact format and includes basic prayers, a catechism, and prayers for special needs. He also emphasized:

"we decided to add the National Anthem of Ukraine and the Spiritual Hymn of Ukraine "God, the Great, the Only, Protect Ukraine for Us". Communicating with the military, we saw their need to have a kind of "compass" with them, which would help them not to lose their internal orientation in difficult times." (*Pray, 2020*).

It is emphasized that the prayer book is not only a call of military chaplains of the RCC in Ukraine, but also a word of encouragement for all servicemen who defend the Motherland.

In 2022, the UGCC published the "Catechism of the Christian Warrior" (*The Catechism, 2022*), which is also a pocket collection of the principles of Christian teaching regarding the moral aspects of military service in wartime, compiled on the basis of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Catechism of the UGCC *Christ is our Easter*. The deputy head of the Department of Military Chaplaincy of the Patriarchal Curia of the UGCC, Father Andriy Zelinsky, a Jesuit with extensive experience as a chaplain in the Ukrainian army, worked on it. *Catechism of the Christian Warrior*: contains not only various prayers, an examination of conscience, but also a number of answers to questions that are relevant to soldiers, a "decalogue" for Ukrainian defenders. It is intended not only for Greek Catholics: even non-Christian soldiers can find spiritual support in it. What is valuable in this Catechism is the emphasis on victory as our real prospect, and victory is determined not only by the expulsion of the enemy from our native land, but also by the development within our own borders of our state, which will protect freedom and dignity of every citizen.

The war continues, and the military chaplaincy of the UGCC and the RCC in Ukraine is being improved, these Churches are responding to the challenges of the time. Thus, at the 98th session of the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC in November 2024, dedicated to the development of military chaplaincy, it was decided: to work out a Strategy for the Development of the Military Chaplaincy of the UGCC until 2030, to approve the Plan for the Development of Military Pastoral Care in the UGCC for the next three years, and to instruct the Department of Military Chaplaincy of the UGCC, the Canonical Department of the UGCC, and other relevant structures of the Patriarchal Curia of the UGCC to develop the Regulations on the Department of Military Chaplaincy of the Patriarchal Curia of the UGCC, the Regulations on the Military Pastor (Chaplain), and the Model Agreement between the Head of the Church and the Diocesan Bishop on the Transfer of a Clergyman to the Subordination of the Head of the Church for the Term of the Military Contract. (*Resolutions, 2024*).

It should be noted that the UGCC and the RCC in Ukraine actively involve modern information and communication tools in their activities, in particular in the field of military chaplaincy: practically all relevant structures of these Churches have, in addition to their websites, a presence in social networks, the blogosphere, mobile platforms, etc. There, church employees responsible for military chaplaincy, and the military chaplains themselves not only inform about their activities, but also look for means for it, for people interested in cooperation, exchange experiences, etc. On open public resources, there are lively discussions of the service of military chaplains, its challenges, new areas, and even new colleagues-chaplains, which are still lacking in the Ukrainian army, are invited (for example (*Chaplaincy, 2025*)).

Conclusions

So, in conclusion, we can identify the following features of military chaplaincy in the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine:

1. The UGCC and the RCC in Ukraine have their own structures that deal with the issue of military chaplaincy and have already gained successful experience of such activities during the war (since 2014).

2. Military chaplains of the UGCC and the RCC in Ukraine are preparing to fulfill their mission, in addition to various levels of church education, — at thematic courses, and in state training centers at military universities. Also, Greek Catholic military chaplains have education and training at their annual gatherings, and Roman Catholic military chaplains' study at the School of Chaplaincy Service organized by the RCC in Ukraine. The training programs and courses include theoretical disciplines, from historical and philosophical to psychological and legal, and practical training in the skills needed for chaplains in the military.

3. The RCC in Ukraine involves both clergy and laity in military chaplaincy (and the corresponding training), and has opened courses for women, nuns, and laypeople in its School of Chaplaincy to prepare them for work among women, both military and civilian. The UGCC, where currently military chaplains are usually male clergy, plans to actively involve women-nuns for auxiliary chaplaincy service.

4. The activities of military chaplains of both the UGCC and the RCC in Ukraine are patriotic.

5. The instructions of the military chaplains of the UGCC and the RCC in Ukraine, which they direct to their believers and all defenders of the Fatherland, are set forth

in the catechetical publications of these Churches “Catechism of the Christian Warrior” and “Pray and Protect!”

6. The military chaplaincy of the UGCC and the RCC in Ukraine actively uses modern information and communication tools: among such innovative tools of military chaplains there are social networks and mobile applications.

Thus, the military chaplaincy of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine meets the current nation-state interests of Ukraine, is dynamically developing and can continue, in cooperation with colleagues from other Churches, state factors and civil society, to successfully implement its potential in the matter of spiritual support of Ukrainian soldiers and all Ukrainians working for our Victory.

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Особливості військового капеланства Української Греко-Католицької Церкви та Римсько-Католицької Церкви в Україні в умовах сучасної війни

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У статті досліджені особливості військового капеланства Української Греко-Католицької Церкви та Римсько-Католицької Церкви в Україні в умовах війни Російської Федерації проти України. З'ясовані структури цих Церков, які опікуються справою військового капеланства та вже набули успішний досвід такої діяльності під час війни (з 2014 р. і донині). Визначені форми навчання військових капеланів: це курси, організовані при державних військових вищих навчальних закладах, тренінги та заняття (в т.ч. в організованій власній Школі капеланського служіння — в РКЦ) з предметів психологічної, правничої, соціально-гуманітарної і медичної проблематики, котрі доповнюють церковну освіту та необхідні під час війни у війську при наданні капеланської опіки, і в тилу — для душпастирського супроводу ветеранів, поранених, рідних військовослужбовців. Виділені особливості підходу до кандидатів у капелани: позиція РКЦ в Україні — ними можуть бути і світські, зокрема й жінки (монахині та мирянки), і їх також запрошують для відповідного навчання; УГКЦ працює над активнішим залученням черниць до капеланської місії. Зауважений патріотичний підхід до капеланського служіння не лише в УГКЦ, але й і в РКЦ в Україні, до посилення україноцентричності якої спричинилась сучасна війна. Визначені форми викладу настанов військових капеланів, що спрямовуються до вірних та всіх захисників Батьківщини: вони здійснюються як у безпосередньому спілкуванні з воїнами та їх близькими, так і у видрукуваних виданнях для військовослужбовців-захисників України — «Катехизмі християнського воїна» (УГКЦ) і «Молись та захищай!» (РКЦ). Виявлено, що у військовому капеланстві УГКЦ та РКЦ активно використовується новаційний інструментарій — сучасні інформаційно-комунікативні засоби (соціальні мережі та мобільні додатки).

Ключові слова: військове капеланство, Українська Греко-Католицька Церква, Римсько-Католицька Церква в Україні, Україна, війна.

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