

"BE CLOSE!": SERVICE OF MILITARY CHAPLAINS DURING THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR (2014-2022)

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Abstract: *The armed aggression of the Russian Federation, which began in 2014, drew the attention of society and religious institutions to the Armed Forces of Ukraine and revealed problems in the establishing and developing the institution of military chaplaincy. This study aims to assess the basics of spirituality and practice, mission and functions of chaplaincy in the Russian-Ukrainian war. It was found that according to their main credo "Be close!"; military chaplains have become an integral part of the military teams providing spiritual and moral support for military personnel. The activity of military chaplains extends far beyond direct service in military units in the combat zone or their deployment in Ukraine. Military chaplains became volunteers who 1) coordinate and deliver humanitarian aid to the military and civilians, 2) maintain contacts with the families of servicemen, wounded and demobilized soldiers, 3) initiate the creation of special programs of spiritual renewal at monasteries, rehabilitation courses at church communities, social events, etc. The chaplains have shown the readiness to resist the challenges of a new phase of large-scale military invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation since February 2022. There are no analogies in contemporary history of creating an institute of military chaplaincy under such conditions that makes the current experience of Ukrainian chaplaincy unique.*

Keywords: *Armed Forces of Ukraine, military chaplaincy, activity, Ukraine, Russian-Ukrainian war.*

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Introduction

The reality of the Russian-Ukrainian war forced us to look at the world from a different angle. Words that seemed banal began to take on personal meaning. Some of them suddenly established themselves in our dictionary. However, the word “chaplain” not only entered the public or ecclesiastical discourse but was firmly entrenched in it. “To be close” is the credo of the military chaplains of many armies. They are called to stay side by side with the military, support them spiritually and become an integral part of the military. Given the historical circumstances, the Ukrainian military chaplaincy is born against the background of the war. There are no historical analogies to the creation of the institute of military chaplaincy under such conditions, which makes our current experience unique.

The institute of chaplaincy play an important role in assisting the military in carrying out their missions. The events of 2013-2014 were a turning point in the chaplaincy of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU), and the subsequent “hybrid war” between Russia and Ukraine thus began a new history of the institute of military chaplaincy. Priests began to perform not only their direct duties related to pastoral work, but also became volunteers. Along with the military on the front line, there were priests of various denominations such as the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and Protestant organizations. Military chaplaincy became even more important from the first days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (February 2022). They continued to operate in conditions of tension between the AFU and society and also between such religious communities as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) and OCU, offering a clear moral presence and position. Unfortunately, the status of the military chaplaincy in Ukraine has not been legislated for a long time, but the contribution that is being made these days by Ukrainian military chaplains provides a clear understanding of the relationship between the chaplaincy and the military missions.

1. The legislative base of independent Ukraine for the service of the military clergy

Since Ukraine’s independence and the establishment of the principle of religious freedom were proclaimed in 1991, the question of the organization of pastoral care among servicemen has arisen. Various advisory bodies were set up to find out about the foreign experience and suggest ways to establish a institute of military chaplaincy, taking into account its multi-religious nature.

The first period of formation of the institute of military chaplaincy covers the years 1992-2008. It can be described as the beginning of establishing cooperation

between religious organizations and military units. It was mostly unsystematic and held in the form of conferences.

The institute of military chaplaincy was founded in 1994, when the National Institute for Strategic Studies together with the Institute for the History of Religion were holding a scientific-practical symposium "Spiritual and Humanitarian Problems of Building the AFU" (May 12, Lviv). It was the time when the advisory body "Inter-Church Council on Pastoral Work in the AFU" was established. There was also an attempt to establish a permanent advisory body of various denominations on pastoral affairs in the AFU (Садов'як, 2021).

In the following years, there were held such conferences as "Army and Spirituality: Freedom of Conscience and Religion" (1995, Kyiv), II International Scientific and Practical Conference "Christian Love and Military Duty" (1997, Kyiv) (Перехейда, 2006 p. 119), "Practice of the Formation of the Military and the Creation of Conditions for Successful Military Service through the Christian Experience" (1999, Kyiv), which raised issues related to the realization of religious rights and freedoms in the AFU, the introduction of the military priesthood and the need for systemic relations between state, Church and army (Бондаренко & Котлярова, 2007 p. 15).

For example, at a conference in 1999, participants addressed the President of Ukraine with the following proposals: to develop a concept of spiritual and pastoral activities of military priests in the AFU; to amend the Law of Ukraine "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" based on the agreed concept; to create Regulations on the institute of chaplains in military structures according to these changes; to amend the Statutes of the AFU; to create an appropriate body that will be responsible for the implementation of pastoral care in the army, under the auspices of the State Committee of Ukraine for Religions or the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations; to start the opening of temples, chapels for worship at military units, etc (Коханчук, 2004).

On October 11-13, 2000, the Jubilee International Military Christian Conference dedicated to the 2000th anniversary of the Nativity of Christ was held in Lviv, at which representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) and RCC decided to establish the All-Ukrainian Interfaith Religious Christian Military Brotherhood (Brotherhood), which officially began its activities in December 2000, but also to develop a common approach to meeting the spiritual needs of their faithful (Всеукраїнське міжконфесійне релігійне християнко-військове братство, 2004).

The first project carried out by the Brotherhood during 2000–2004 was the training of chaplains for the AFU. The training lasted for four weeks, and the total number of study hours per course reached 200 hours. Students received knowledge of military psychology, international humanitarian law, the military doctrine of Ukraine, the structure of the AFU and got acquainted with the experience of chaplains in the US Army. Classes were held not only in Kyiv but also in Lviv and Khmelnytsky. Each graduate received a certificate of completion of the course and a special certifi-

cate of the course of international humanitarian law, issued by the Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Ukraine. The course was attended by more than 150 priests and seminarians of various denominations (Коханчук, 2004).

Because of this bottom-up initiative, in 2006 the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine (MDU) issued Directive № D-25 "On Regulating the Religious Needs of Servicemen of the AFU", and on November 1, 2008, the sector of work with religious organizations was created in the Department of Humanitarian Policy of MDU. Therefore, on November, 10 of the same year, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed on the pastoral care of servicemen of the AFU together with seven denominations whose believers serve there (Меморандум про співпрацю..., 2008).

Then, the second stage of the in the AFU began, which lasted from October 2008 to early 2014 (Владиченко, 2014 p. 180). In 2009 the Pastoral Care Council (PCC) at the MDU was established by the Order (Order № 115 of March 17, 2009). PCC had to establish effective cooperation with religious organizations and develop unified approaches to the introduction of the Institute of Military Chaplaincy (Неніпенко, 2013 p. 84). During its work, the PCC developed several normative legal acts: "The Concept of Pastoral Care in the AFU" (approved by the MDU Order of April 22, 2011) (Основні аспекти Концепції душпастирської опіки..., 2022) and "Guidelines for Military Authorities Who Serve in the AFU On Spiritual, Moral, Ethical and Military-patriotic Education" (approved by the MDU in February 2013) (Методичні рекомендації..., 2013), which defined a clear mechanism for ensuring the right of servicemen to meet religious needs.

The next meeting of the PCC took place on June 5, 2013. The meeting was attended by authorized representatives of the RCC, UOC-KP, UAOC, UGCC, All-Ukrainian Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches (WCC-ECB) and the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine (DUMU). Participants made proposals for joint activities and the creation of a single curriculum for military priests and approved the "Code of Military Priest (Chaplain)" (Кодекс військового священника..., 2013).

The issue of the presence of military chaplains has become relevant since the annexation of Crimea, the creation of Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic with the assistance of the Russian Federation and the deployment of hostilities in eastern Ukraine. Thus, in July 2014, the third stage of the institute of military chaplaincy development began.

On July 2, 2014, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine issued Order № 677-р "On Military Clergy Service (Chaplaincy Service) in the AFU, National Guard, State Special Transport Service and State Border Guard Service" (Розпорядження Про службу військового духовенства..., 2014) and "Regulations on Military Clergy Service in the AFU" (Order № 40 of January 27, 2015) (Про затвердження Положення про службу..., 2015). In January 2017, the "Regulations on Military Clergy Service in the AFU" of 2015 expired. Instead, the MDU, General of the AFU S. Poltorak signed a new Regulation on the service of the military clergy (chaplaincy) in the AFU (Regulation 2017) (Про затвердження Положення про службу..., 2016). Both documents set

out the main activities and tasks of a military priest, the requirements for a chaplain candidate, his rights and responsibilities. However, the Regulations of 2017 are general, while the Regulations of 2015 contained more specific requirements related to the institute of military chaplaincy in the AFU. Until 2021, the activities of military priests in Ukraine were mainly regulated by the Regulations of 2017.

In June 2019, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (VRU) adopted in the first reading the draft law № 10244-1 "On Military Chaplaincy". In September of the same year, the document was withdrawn, and the situation with the status and legal status of chaplains in military units remained unresolved (Закірова, 2020).

Gaps in the law prompted a resolution of the status of military chaplains at the local level. In particular, military chaplains received the official status of volunteers of the war in Donbas (from 2018 Operation United Forces)³ at the regional level by the decision of the Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Council of May 2020. Deputies of the Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Council decided at the regional level to recognize military chaplains as volunteer soldiers who were or are part of volunteer formations that were formed or self-organized (Капелани зможуть отримати офіційний статус..., 2020).

This problem was also updated by the published data on the number of clergy in the military units of Ukraine. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), about 130 positions of military chaplains have been introduced in the AFU to date, more than 90 of them have been staffed. According to the information portal "News", in 2.5 years in the AFU the staff of chaplains has grown by 28 people, and the real number – by 23 people (Капелани в ЗСУ..., 2020).

The draft law № 4148 "On Military Chaplaincy in the AFU" of 2020 submitted to the VRU became another document aimed at eliminating the unresolved issue in the Ukrainian legal field. The document regulated the rights and responsibilities of military chaplains and their assistants, as well as the ways of their interaction with the leadership of the units to meet the religious needs of servicemen. Unfortunately, it was withdrawn due to criticism of the bill.

On January 22, 2021, a draft law on the Military Chaplaincy Service № 4626 was submitted to the VRU. It was planned to establish the Military Chaplaincy Service and to legislate the status of military chaplains as servicemen, determination of organizational and legal bases of the interaction of military formations and religious organizations. The project defined the principles on which the activity of the Military Chaplaincy Service is being carried out, its structure, the order of subordination and the total number of chaplains. On November 30, 2021, the bill was adopted by the VRU, and on December 20, 2021, its text was signed by the President of Ukraine. This Law of the Military Chaplaincy Service № 4626 became the first document that

³ Operation United Forces (OUF) is a reformatting of the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) with the imposition of martial law or state of emergency. The OUF activities began on April 30, 2018.

officially recognized chaplains as servicemen and completed the process of forming the institute of military chaplaincy in the AFU.

Functioning of the institute of military chaplaincy in the legal field of Ukraine will contribute to the reform of the AFU, the development of democratic processes in society that require combining the spiritual interests of servicemen with national and state interests, and establishing partnerships between the army and the Church.

2. The military chaplaincy service formation in the structure of church organizations in Ukraine

Given the need to organize institute of military chaplaincy in the AFU, since 1992, units have been established in the internal structure of Churches and religious associations to cooperate with law enforcement agencies.

The UOC established the Synodal Department for Interaction with the AFU and Other Military Units of Ukraine in 1999, headed by Metropolitan Augustine of Bila Tserkva and Boguslav. The UOC-KP had in its structure the Synodal Department of Spiritual and Patriotic Education in Relations with the AFU and Other Military Formations of Ukraine (founded in 1999), headed by Archpriest Dmytrii Sadoviak. In the UGCC, chaplaincy is coordinated by the Department of the Patriarchal Curia of the UGCC for the Pastoral Care of the Power Structures of Ukraine (established in 2006). Bishop Mykhailo Koltun has been appointed Head of the Department, and Fr. Liubomyr Yavorsky (Филипчук, 2015 р. 163) has become a clerk for pastoral care in the Armed Forces. The Clerical Board of Ukraine's Muslims "UMMA" initiated the creation of the Office of the Military Chaplaincy of the Muslims of Ukraine, headed by Imam Sergei (Murad) Putilin. The Office was tasked with caring for followers of Islam in the Armed Forces, the National Guard, volunteer battalions, and the State Border Guard Service (Імами-капелани долучилися до розробки Закону України..., 2020).

The Protestant direction of military chaplaincy is represented by different organizations. In 1992, Vasyl Mykolaiyovych, a minister of the All-Ukrainian Union of Evangelical Baptists, initiated the founding of the Association of Christian Soldiers of Ukraine, which aimed to promote pastoral care in the AFU and spread Christian values among the military. Evangelical churches of Ukraine began serving the military and their families on the initiative of former military man Valery Alimov in 1996. In 2014, at the initiative of the pastors of the Ukrainian Church of Christians of the Evangelical Faith (UCCEF), the organization "Ukrainian Evangelical Chaplaincy" was founded, which trains chaplains in five areas for the war zone in Ukraine. Protestants train specialists in prison, military, police, medical and municipal areas. Also, representatives of various Protestant denominations formed the Battalion of Chaplains, which in December 2014 was officially registered as a public organization "First

Ukrainian Battalion of Military Chaplains”(Українське євангельське капеланство..., 2017).

More than seven hundred clergy and church activists visited the conflict zone during the fighting. There are chaplain priests, volunteer priests, assistant priests, church activists and others among them. Unfortunately, there is no clear figure for their number today. Most of the calculations were made by summarizing requests to the MDU from churches and public organizations with a request to admit clergy to the army as chaplains. The most active position of participation of military chaplains among the Churches operating in Ukraine is being occupied by OCU⁴ (295 in 2016, over 600 in 2021) (Майже 600 військових капеланів..., 2020), UGCC (123 in 2016 - 2021) and Representatives of evangelical unions (110 in 2016 – 2021). A separate group consists of volunteer priests, deacons, seminarians, activists of these denominations, the number of which from 2016 to 2021 increased from 80 to more than half a thousand (Калениченко & Коханчук, 2016).

Despite the large presence of military chaplains among the Ukrainian military in the combat zone during 2016–2019, there were difficulties in performing their duties as priests. The latter were predominantly not psychologically prepared and were not fully aware of the content of the chaplaincy mission due to lack of practice. Effective assistance in the organization of the chaplaincy service in Ukraine was provided by representatives of the Royal Canadian Chaplaincy Service of the Armed Forces of Canada, who together with the Department of Interaction with Military Chaplains of the Center for Moral and Psychological Support of the AFU conducted training courses for Ukrainian chaplains (Information from the General Staff..., 2019).

In February 2017, the official training courses began, which took place in three stages, in which more than 70 chaplains took part. The first course took place in February 2017, the second course in February 2018 (Якубовська, 2017) and the third one was in December 2019 (Information from the General Staff..., 2019). During the two-week course, Canadian chaplains introduced students to the peculiarities of the work of chaplains of the Canadian Armed Forces, as well as methods of spiritual resilience and application of chaplaincy skills in a pluralistic society.

The main goal of the training course is to improve the skills of military chaplains who represent various religious denominations and serve in the spiritual area both in the area of hostilities in eastern Ukraine and military garrisons in the rear. During the classes, students mastered the theoretical and practical issues of organizing a chaplaincy mission in the Armed Forces. Separate classes were devoted to the problems of maintaining the mental and strengthening the moral and spiritual condition of soldiers.

⁴ During 2000-2018, the three largest Orthodox denominations operated in Ukraine: the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church (UAOC), the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP). In December 2018, the UOC-KP and the UAOC merged into the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (UOC), which in January 2019 received a Tomos on autocephaly from the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The project of the International Chaplaincy Camps, coordinated by Yaroslav Malko, allows priests to learn from the international experience in providing spiritual and psychological assistance to servicemen. In general, Drahomanov National Pedagogical University, Ostroh Academy National University, Marcynkowski National University, as well as several higher theological educational institutions of Ukraine are involved in the educational process. Numerous courses, training sessions and seminars are also held. In particular, in February and September 2016, such training was organized by the joint efforts of the UCCEF and the MDU. As a result, about 90 military chaplains received MDU certificates and the right to follow the AFU.

A special role in the training of highly qualified specialists in the field of chaplaincy is played by the Association of Professional Chaplains of Ukraine under the leadership of Valerii Trufanov. There are 33 public associations and institutions of various current tasks within the framework of the Association. 12 chaplaincy schools were held in Cherkasy, Kyiv, Kharkiv, Dnipro and Odesa through their joint efforts. 320 chaplains were trained, 120 of them became participants in the war in eastern Ukraine. In addition to working with soldiers, directly in combat areas, evangelical chaplains provide spiritual and material assistance to servicemen undergoing treatment and rehabilitation in hospitals. In particular, such a ministry exists in the Irpin Military Hospital and the Kyiv Main Military Clinical Hospital. During 2014–2017, UCCEF delivered at least 3,000 tons of food, clothing, and medicine to eastern Ukraine. In particular, military ammunition and other equipment were worth over 4 million UAH. Food, that weighed more than 300 tons, was worth more than 4.24 million UAH. Moreover, tactical first-aid kits and means of hygiene cost 100 thousand UAH (Українське євангельське капеланство..., 2017).

Over the past 5 years, the pastoral care of the AFU has become an integral part of maintaining the moral and psychological health of personnel. In 2021, soldiers were also cared for by military psychologists along with chaplains. The Center for Moral and Psychological Support of the AFU operates permanently. Mobile groups of operative psychological assistance to the personnel of “Charlie” and “Alpha” were created, who conducted more than 400 psychological training sessions and consultations. Systematic work of chaplains and psychological services made it possible to introduce the rotation of full-time military priests (chaplains) in the Joint Forces Operation (General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, 2022).

Thanks to the chaplains, the Ukrainian military receives humanitarian aid in combat zones and supports the local population. For example, since 2014, each diocese of the UGCC has started taking care of the faithful of parishes in eastern Ukraine on the initiative of the spiritual leadership of this church. For example, believers of the Ternopil-Zboriv diocese to provide humanitarian aid to the cities of Lysychansk, Luhansk, Severodonetsk, and Popasna. Priests and seminarians go on spiritual missions for the military and residents of these cities. Children and young people from Lysychansk often visit the famous pilgrimage destination in the village of Zarvanytsia, which belongs to the Ternopil-Zboriv diocese.

In the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war that began on February 24, 2022, chaplaincy became a significant contribution to strengthening the fighting spirit of the defenders of the Motherland and supporting the local population in the areas of devastating bombing by the occupiers. From the first days of the war, the Department of Military Chaplaincy of the Patriarchal Curia of the UGCC and the Synodal Department of the Military Clergy of the OCU included coordination of military chaplains and communication with Ukrainian security forces, Sumy, Mykolaiv, Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson, Dnipro and Odesa to their main tasks. Having mobilized chaplains, the successful supply of aid from the western borders to the front line has been successfully established through the establishment of local logistics centres. In addition, on March 21, 2022, an online meeting of the Holy Synod of the PCU was held, at which it was decided that the military chaplains of this Church may carry light personal weapons designed not for offensive action but to protect themselves and those under their care.

Unfortunately, among the thousands of civilian Ukrainians killed, there are casualties among military and medical chaplains, and many of them are in captivity⁵. The Russian military captured priests of the Odesa eparchy of the OCU Vasyl Vyrozub and Oleksandr Chokov, who were on board the rescue ship "Sapphire", which was to take the bodies of Ukrainian soldiers killed on Snake Island (Zmiinyi Island, 2022). However, as a result, it turned out that there were no casualties on the island, and the Russian military used the situation as an excuse to insidiously lure the rescue ship, which had no weapons, and capture it with the civilian crew and OCU priests (Агресори захопили двох священників..., 2022).

Conclusions

Institute of the military chaplaincy has a long historical tradition in Ukrainian society. Its absence in the Soviet period was due to the ideology of building a religious society. The destruction of the USSR and the proclamation of Ukraine as an independent state exacerbated the geopolitical situation in the region. The assertion of Ukraine's independence provoked sharp opposition from the Russian Federation. It resulted in the violation of Ukraine's territorial borders. The development of the AFU in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war required the renewal of the institute of chaplaincy and the formation of the legislative field of its functioning. In 1994-2008, the cooperation of religious organizations with military units was not systematic but held in the form of conferences. During 2009-2013, the right of servicemen to meet their religious needs was recognized at the legislative level. During 2014-2021, several documents were adopted that legislated the status of military chaplains as servicemen and completed almost thirty years of the establishment of the institute of military chaplaincy in Ukraine.

⁵ The number of dead and those in captivity is unknown.

The duration of the formation of the legal field of the military chaplaincy, as well as the difficulties in building the structures of the AFU, affected the nature of the activities of priests in the army. During the war in eastern Ukraine, the service of military chaplains was not limited to the spiritual care of servicemen and volunteers in the war zone. They took on the role of volunteers who brought humanitarian aid to the military and civilians. Maintaining contacts with the families of servicemen, wounded and demobilized ones has become an important element in the chaplaincy service. Military chaplains and local clergy initiated the creation of special programs of spiritual renewal at monasteries, rehabilitation courses at church communities, social events and more. The activities of military chaplains went far beyond direct service in military units in the combat zone or their deployment in Ukraine. Chaplains became a bridge between the military and communities, bringing churches and religious organizations to a new level of social activity.

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