

Pastoral challenges during the war in Ukraine

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People experience different kinds of trauma during the war: some are traumatized by information, some do not know how to survive difficult economic times, and others are mourning the loss of a loved one or the tragedy befalling the entire nation. Trauma can cause panic, fear, aggression, and even hatred in a person's heart. The response to these challenges must be increased by pastoral zeal, sacrificial priestly service, and constant, sincere communication through the Word of God, which heals and comforts those affected by the war.

In these moments, there is a great need for silence to listen to others, and to be attentive to what they say and how they express it. Often, people just want to share their experiences, to feel heard, to feel that they are not alone or abandoned.

Challenge 1: Not to Lose, but to Find the Meaning of Life, Even in Inhumane Circumstances of War

The importance and value of the gift of life. Live and love your neighbors, and appreciate the gift of their life. Value cultivates strength and resilience in us. When we lose someone close to us, they move into eternity, but their values continue to live in our memory. During the war, resilience helps us to maintain our spiritual and mental health. We should not focus solely on our experiences, but through practicing resilience, try to act, and be useful in what we know, can, and want to do. Through resilience, if a person has meaning, they are able to overcome all these difficulties.

Challenge 2: The Need for Acts of Mercy

Churches throughout Ukraine have become centers of humanitarian aid and sacrificial volunteering. The next step is not just to give packages but to build relationships. The war has highlighted true values for each of us. Human life is valuable, a friend's support, a helping hand, unity, and love.

Since the beginning of the war and up till now, we have cooperated with organizations from various European countries, particularly with the Capuchin brothers from Germany. Together with them, at the beginning of the war, we organized trips to the main railway station. There we met the first refugees, distributed food, and necessary clothing, and accompanied them to temporary housing, and also to the border crossing. We tried to be helpful and serve others.

Challenge 3: The Need to Serve the Military

Today, Christians empathize with the boys and girls who protect us from the enemy more than ever before. However, the current chaplaincy and pastoral care are only the beginning of a long journey to heal their traumatized souls and support their families.

Our seminarian brothers learn to act and be useful in all dimensions of extraordinary pastoral service, especially in wartime conditions: visiting the military on training grounds with a chaplain, thanking them during services, talking to wounded soldiers in hospitals, organizing various camps, spiritual pilgrimages for military families and their children, accompanying liturgical singing, funeral processions of soldiers, and always being there.

It is necessary to prepare future clergy for practical challenges: how to conduct soldiers' funerals, how to serve families who have lost loved ones, and how to be with those who have gone abroad and left their closest relatives in Ukraine. The main question and challenge today is how pastors should move from providing humanitarian aid to providing spiritual care.

Challenge 4: The Need for Fervent Prayer

While the battle took place in the valley, Moses lifted his hands to God on the mountain (Exodus 17:11).

Our goal is clear — to restore just peace, and for this, we need God's help. The war has taught us resilience. We will never be the same as we once were; we will be different. These trials and stresses give us the opportunity to expand our ability

to adapt to stressful situations and overcome difficulties. We become braver, more enduring, and stronger in will and spirit.

Seminarian brothers participate in "missions for missions" — leading Stations of the Cross in parishes, helping displaced persons and refugees cope with the loss of their homes, while also using collected funds to aid those living in inhumane conditions in the frontline zone. During the Easter holidays, seminarians travel to these eastern regions of Ukraine where the war is ongoing, assisting priests in bringing the good news of the Risen Christ to people suffering and wounded by the war.

Challenge 5: The Need to Reevaluate Theology

The war has raised many questions requiring practical answers. Notably, the greatest shifts in perspective today concern the concept of "pacifism — just war," as well as the theology of suffering. Theology teaches "not only about the resurrection but also that before the resurrection there was the cross and suffering," which helps to understand the tragic experience of war.

A significant challenge in pastoral care is the phenomenon of involuntary separation from family. Such separation is a psychologically and spiritually difficult trial, especially during a war that creates uncertainty about future reunification. Approximately 44% of Ukrainians have been forced to part with their families due to the war. Therefore, it is crucial to work towards preserving the family institution.

The number of social orphans, street children who have lost their parents for various reasons due to the war, has also increased.

Challenge 6: The Need for Preaching the Gospel

The greatest thing the Church can do for its country is to remain the Church. We don't just attend church services but are God's Church wherever we are. What was once questionable — values rather than life interests — has become central for many Ukrainians. There has been a shift in priorities. Unfortunately, not everyone still understands that there is a war in Ukraine — two years after the full-scale invasion and ten years of war in total. The war has taught us to thank our resilient warriors daily for defending Ukraine, for allowing us to live, work, and study.