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FAITH-BASED ACTORS IN UKRAINE: MAPPING CONTRIBUTIONS, NEEDS, DIVIDES, AND GROWTH AREAS IN WARTIME

Developed by Dialogue in Action research team (July-August 2025) and supported by ADRA Denmark and DanChurchAid-Norwegian ChurchAid Joint Country Programme (JCPUA)

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This report was developed by Dialogue in Action team (Ukraine) with joint review and support by ADRA Denmark and DanChurchAid-Norwegian ChurchAid Joint Country Programme (JCPUA). It is a pleasure and honor to work in close cooperation.

Disclaimer: The positions and recommendations in the report are not necessarily those of ADRA and DCA-NCA, but all serve to illustrate the discussion.

Main goal of the analytical report: To assess and map the structures, capacities, and public engagement of faith-based communities and networks in Ukraine – at local, regional, and national levels – with a view to identifying promising avenues for strategic collaboration. Our aim is to inform a more intentional, value-driven engagement with faith actors in the domains of humanitarian response, social cohesion, conflict prevention and peacebuilding, public theology and rights-based public advocacy.

Methodology of the report is based in qualitative sociology with mixed methods. First, qualitative desk research that includes main public statements provided by religious organizations, networks and leaders together with social media messages. Second, two different question guides were developed for semi-structured qualitative interviews with focus on national/international experts and local faith-based actors. Then, 4 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with international and national experts in religious affairs with a key focus on main trends and changes from their perspective. Additionally, 6 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of Orthodox, Roman-Catholic, different Protestant churches and Islamic community in Mykolaiv region as a special focus for this research. Additional data was collected during [Dialogue in Action](#) [1] fieldwork to help plan the future programming as a part of the [Research in Action](#) [2] methodological frame.

Abbreviations

ADRA – Adventist Development and Relief Agency
AUCCRO – All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations
DiA – Dialogue in Action
DCA – Danish Church Aid
FBO – Faith-based organization
IDP – Internally displaced people
MHPSS – Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
NCA – Norwegian Church Aid

NGO – Non-governmental organization
OCU – Orthodox Church in Ukraine
RAMU – Religious administration of Muslims of Ukraine
RCC – Roman Catholic Church
RO – Religious organization
UGCC – Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church
UOC – Ukrainian Orthodox Church

Link: <https://www.danchurchaid.org/faith-based-action-in-ukraine-contributions-and-challenges>

Table of Contents:

I. STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. General conclusions

2. Strategic Recommendations for International Engagement

II. RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE AND ROLES OF THE FAITH-BASED ACTORS IN UKRAINE

1.1. Ukraine's Multi-Religious Context and Structure

1.2. Why faith-based actors are important in Ukrainian context

III. WHAT FAITH-BASED ACTORS OFFERED AND CAN OFFER

2.1. Main faith-based responses to the current Ukrainian context

2.2. Responses in humanitarian aid provision

2.3. Responses in peacebuilding and social cohesion

2.4. Responses in mental health and psychological support

2.5. Responses in public theology

2.6. Responses in advocacy

IV. WHAT NEEDS ADDRESSING TO STRENGTHEN THE CONTRIBUTION OF FAITH-BASED ACTORS

3.1. Strategic changes in the programming

3.2. Possible changes in public theology and advocacy

3.3. Opportunities in peacebuilding and social cohesion

V. REFERENCES

ADDITION 1: ANNEX: TABLE AND PROFILES OF KEY FAITH-BASED STAKEHOLDERS



Source: DanChurchAid & Norwegian Church Aid in Ukraine

I. STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. General conclusions

Faith-based actors in Ukraine are undergoing a significant transformation, marked by increased humanitarian engagement, adaptive spiritual leadership, and emerging interfaith collaboration, particularly in war-affected regions like Mykolaiv. As before, they can rely on high level of trust from Ukrainian society and serve as local/regional/national connectors with well-developed social capital. The war has redefined their role from purely pastoral entities to hybrid institutions offering social services, psychological care, and grassroots stabilization. However, this shift reveals critical vulnerabilities: burnout among clergy, lack of strategic planning, weak coordination mechanisms, and unresolved intra-Orthodox and interfaith tensions. At the same time, irreversible changes such as lines of polarization in whole society, institutional chaplaincy, and post-Soviet theological renewal signal a historic turning point. The progress cannot be made without active engagement from international organizations and partners starting from strategy development support and ending with financing development needs. There is an urgent need for strategic support—from capacity building and trauma-informed training to deeper inclusion of religious communities in national and international recovery frameworks—to ensure these faith-based structures evolve as resilient and responsible actors in Ukraine's long-term reconstruction and peace-building and optimise their important contribution. Below there are more direct suggestions on how to improve the situation based on interviews done and our field experience.

2. Strategic Recommendations for International Engagement

2.1. Institutional support for localisation: Assistance to Ukrainian faith-based organizations in developing a common strategy for working in the region and long-term development plans. There is the need for joint strategizing, investing in organizational development, and then in the support of projects to continue and their joint design with international partners, but based on the ideas of Ukrainian organizations. There is a need to re-consider partnership as well as to empower planning and implementation cycle by context sensitive analysis and high level of flexibility.

2.2. Educational programs in MHPSS: Respondents mentioned a huge need in adult training for ministers and FBOs staff in psychological aid, trauma work, burnout prevention, and peace-building. Still, those programs should not be as one-time action but more as coaching process with supporting changes and developments in recent projects of participants. This complex educational support will create real long-term changes and will not be taken as something “as if it was imposed from above”.

2.3. Support for networking: Creation of re-designed coordination platforms between territorial communities and interfaith working groups for main help providers. There are already a lot of working groups so the design of those precise working groups should be careful and locally-led, so participants could feel the difference because of them. There should not be internationally only or locally only led groups – a mix of them would get the best results.

[→ Back to contents](#)

2.4. Funding for transition: There is a need for support for transitional programs for FBOs from mass humanitarian aid to deeper spiritual and psychosocial work, as well as co-designing programs with Ukrainian partners in a context-sensitive way and monitoring/evaluation system. Organizational development and mental health recovery for experts should be also included.

2.5. Work with memory and reconciliation: As an existentially-based topic, it requires system work on different tracks, including local dialogues, art projects, theological developments and international advocacy. Working with memory should not be considered as artificial addendum but rather lived practices and rituals that help to keep the focus in life routine and overcome loss of people.

2.6. Advocacy for involvement on programmatic level: Donors and INGOs should involve religious actors in the projects of international donors, lifting artificial restrictions on their participation in humanitarian and other programs. International actors should play a crucial role for networking and helping Ukrainian experts in the process of advocacy.

2.7. Youth engagement: On programmatic level: To utilise the potential in Ukrainian youth as agents for change, the following is needed. To develop systemic and constructive approaches to working with youth, including creating safe spaces for dialogue where they can openly discuss topics like identity, resilience, trauma, respectful engagement across differences and their future role in Ukraine. Establish mentorship programs that connect young people with experienced religious and community leaders for guidance. To put a special focus of international youth exchange, at least on European level.

On project level: Support youth-led projects focused on volunteering and community restoration to empower them as active participants in rebuilding their country. Fund creative and cultural initiatives that help youth process wartime experiences and express their vision for the future. Strengthen youth solidarity networks across religious and regional lines, providing a platform for them to make their voices heard, advocate for their needs, and strengthen their sense of hope for the future.

2.8. Change to proactive position for Ukrainian ministers: As all experts mentioned, there is a deep need for a proactive position of religious communities and especially leaders instead of reactionism and for positioning themselves as part of civil society. That would allow to gain full responsibility and change worldview of faith-based leaders into more social engagement and theological responses at the same time. That could lead to transformation of their own identity in a positive way to consolidate efforts and adequately respond to external and internal challenges (theologically and practically).

2.9. Peacebuilding component integration into HDP projects: Integration of a peacebuilding component into the humanitarian activities of churches should be a part of almost all interventions (primarily social cohesion and comprehensive case management instead of simple distribution). That would allow to widen the focus of the support programs as well as to re-think church's identity, mission and how it can be realized in a practical way.

[→ Back to contents](#)



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II. RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE AND ROLES OF THE FAITH-BASED ACTORS IN UKRAINE

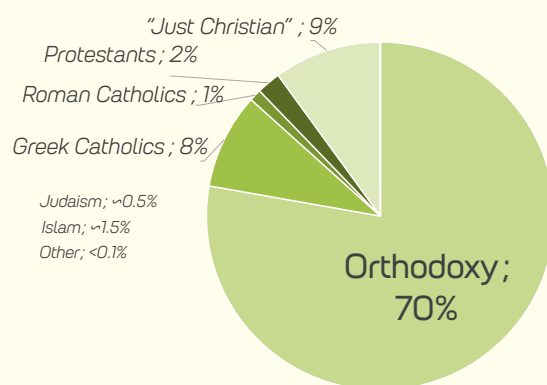
1. Ukraine's Multi-Religious Context and Structure

Ukraine is characterized by a vibrant multi-religious landscape shaped by its complex history, cultural diversity, and evolving geopolitical context. The country is home to a variety of religious traditions, with Christianity (predominantly Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic and Protestant) representing the majority, alongside significant Jewish and Muslim communities. Additionally, non-Abrahamic faiths such as Buddhism, Hinduism, the Society for Krishna Consciousness and Slavic Native Faith (neopaganism or Ridnovira) and others maintain an active, though smaller, presence.

As of January 2025, Ukraine hosts over 34,000 [registered](#)¹ religious organizations² representing more than 55 denominations. The Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) counts 8,511 organizations, while the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (ex-Moscow Patriarchate) remains the largest single denomination with 10,118 entities, despite ongoing transitions since the full-scale war began.

Ukraine's religious landscape is marked by strong Christian predominance and growing pluralism. As of 2022, approximately 85% of Ukrainians identify as Christian, with 70% affiliating with Orthodoxy. Greek Catholics (UGCC) represent about 8% of the population, Roman Catholics 1%, and Protestants and other Christian denominations around 2% each. The share of those identifying as "simply Christian" continues to grow, currently [totaling about 9%](#) [3]. Minority religions such as Islam (1–1.6%; moreover, one of the main ethnic groups within the Muslim community, the Crimean Tatars, are an indigenous people), Judaism (<0.5%), and small communities of Buddhists, Hindus, and others (each <0.1%) also contribute to the country's diversity.

[The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations](#) [4] (AUCCRO), which unites almost 95% of religious communities in Ukraine kept in touch with the Office of the President and the government after the start of the full-scale invasion. AUCCRO regularly communicates with various humanitarian initiatives and its public messaging includes appeals condemning Russia's aggression and calls to stop the aggression. In addition, the leaders of religious organizations have, independently and on behalf of their confessions, appealed to Russian President Vladimir Putin, as well as to world state and religious leaders, for support and assistance in [stopping active hostilities](#)³. Despite the challenges posed by war, Ukraine remains one of Europe's most religiously diverse societies, where multiple traditions coexist and engage with the shifting social and political context.



¹ Anastasiia Lisova. DESS: Over two thousand religious communities have joined the OCU since the start of the full-scale war // LIGA.net. - 2025

² By religious organizations here meant only registered as religious units, not faith-based NGOs.

³ AUCCRO statement on the initiatives to bring the Russian authorities to justice and restore fairness // AUCCRO. - 2023

2. Why faith-based actors are important in Ukrainian context

Faith-based organizations in Ukraine are active members of civil society and localised horizontal networks of cooperation in all regions. They serve as a part of the cultural identity as well as a religious one, and have been engaged with significant societal changes such as the Maidan protests and reactions to global events. They may not always realize how powerful their civic involvement is, or their level of influence – they scored one of the highest level of trust⁴ among Ukrainian society during the period since Ukraine's independence (from 72,5% to 62,5%).

Religious actors have several social functions that are limited or impossible for secular social initiatives. For example, they can create moral codes for the society and communicate values; they can work with existential issues and concepts of moral trauma, especially relevant during war time; they can form and spread narratives that impact numerous people from different social groups; they can advocate on the level of everyday or even formal diplomacy through their own international networks. However, all those functions require their own readiness to step in and to contribute in a sensitive way.

Faith actors combine parishes, chaplaincies, monastic communities, seminaries and educational institutions, faith-rooted (parareligious) NGOs, youth and volunteer movements. Their reach extends to urban and rural areas, including frontline and recently de-occupied territories where other actors face security and staffing constraints. Their legitimacy stems from pastoral care, long-term presence, and relational networks, which are indispensable for accessing vulnerable groups and sustaining support over time.

One unique aspect of faith-based communities, for instance in small territorial communities – is to create a safe space for different social groups that could not come together in other circumstances. Non-believers can also make use of this, provided they trust religious actors, who are guided by principles of confidentiality and independence from state involvement. This quality makes it highly relevant for peacebuilding and social cohesion efforts. Faith actors local and national presence before, during and after conflict and their multi-mandated functions as humanitarian actors, their agency in building cohesion and peace and their public voice for rights and inclusion makes them key actors across the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus. Thus, they can serve as unique connectors and HDP projects providers that could give effective results of interventions.

The full-scale war has prompted a significant expansion and systematization of the social service carried out by religious actors in Ukraine—work that had already been ongoing prior to the invasion. In response to the new and rapidly evolving realities, religious communities have had to adapt their modes of service to address heightened social vulnerability, displacement, and trauma. Moreover, the scarcity of resources and the urgency of needs have compelled them to establish crisis-driven cooperation with other civil society and humanitarian organizations, often navigating unfamiliar institutional landscapes under conditions of extreme pressure and limited time due to lack of understanding (faith literacy) of donors and INGOs'.

⁴ Рівень релігійності, довіра до Церкви, конфесійний розподіл та міжцерковні відносини в українському суспільстві (жовтень 2024р.) // Razumkov Centre. – 2025

III. WHAT FAITH-BASED ACTORS OFFERED AND CAN OFFER

1. Main faith-based responses to the current Ukrainian context

Social service as mainly crisis response (evacuation, shelters, humanitarian aid, basic crisis support etc.) was well-organized and rapidly developed [5] in all faith-based organizations in Ukraine and helped a lot where state and secular civil society representatives were less active or able to help (e.g., support for communities in a grey zone/close to the front line territories, evacuation from occupied territories through religious networks, accepting people in monasteries and religious property abroad, etc.).

Compared to their crisis response - especially during the early stages of the full-scale invasion - religious actors have been less effective in realising their strong potential in other areas of strategic social engagement. This is particularly evident in their limited capacity to critically revise their societal mission during wartime, articulate unified advocacy messages, and develop coherent theological responses. While the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO) has engaged in public diplomacy and coordinated its position with state representatives, the collective voice of religious communities could be significantly more powerful and visible across multiple levels of public discourse.

Another challenge has been the mobilization process. Various religious organizations sought to secure deferments for their clergy or to fill positions within the chaplaincy quota system. These efforts often lacked a unified strategy and further underscored the need for clearer institutional frameworks and joint planning in engaging with state mechanisms during wartime.



Source: ADRA Ukraine

[→ Back to contents](#)

The areas of societal engagement undertaken by religious communities and organizations can be broadly categorized into the following clusters: crisis humanitarian responses; peacebuilding and social cohesion; psychological support and mental health; and contributions through public theology and advocacy. Each of these interventions reflects both immediate responses to wartime realities and longer-term aspirations for societal healing and transformation across the HDP nexus. In what follows, we propose a more detailed examination of the internal trends shaping these areas of engagement.

2. Responses in humanitarian aid provision

Religious communities have become centers of humanitarian support, integration of IDPs, and crisis help. Many respondents and experts talk about the help they provided at the beginning of the full-scale war or what they are doing now. One of the most common humanitarian response practices are parish-based hubs for distribution of food, hygiene kits, clothing and medicine; water access solutions (e.g., boreholes and filtration systems) implemented on church premises in frontline regions; legal counselling, referrals to social services, targeted support for IDPs, elderly, and persons with disabilities; chaplaincy and volunteer support to military and medical facilities (varying from informal pastoral presence to formalized services).

However, religious communities do not consider how to move strategically forward in the humanitarian sphere, such a reduction in the volume of aid to focus more on more strategic developments, like psychological and spiritual support. Also, despite great examples, testimonies, and numbers, there is an increasing lack of personnel as people gradually leave affected areas⁵. New ones arrive, but they are more likely to be beneficiaries who need help than those actively ready to get involved in the service.

As respondents mentioned, social services have changed the attitude of the population towards religious communities in a positive way, but a significant focus of the church's mission has shifted from pastoral care to humanitarian issues. Many people perceive the church as a charitable organization, which shows that the humanitarian sphere takes up a lot of resources, which may not leave enough for the church's work in other spheres. Thus, the church is increasingly engaging with civil society, but it is not yet fully recognized as a member, as many donors and partners remain hesitant to involve religious actors.

According to the national and local experts, there is a risk of exhaustion and loss of volunteer resources: people are leaving, new ones are arriving – mostly as recipients of aid, not as active distributors. Short-term projects do not help to sustain the work done as well as funding crisis after USAID shut down lowered the level of financial support.

Respondents also emphasize a weak coordination among churches regarding the distribution of humanitarian aid. There was an example of three churches arriving in the same village at the same time to distribute humanitarian aid. This is despite the existence of regular interfaith prayer and pastoral meetings; however, they do not coordinate humanitarian aid well.

⁵ By affected areas we mean mainly close to the front line territories. However, due to the changing character of attacks after 2022, all territories can be affected, starting from Kyiv and ending in Western Ukraine.

One of the less visible strategic risks—currently discussed confidentially only within larger religious foundations - is the potential substitution of state functions by faith-based actors. Beginning in 2024, a [government resolution](#)⁶ allowed for public procurement of social services provided through Resilience Centers, which are expected to be established in every territorial community. Many local faith-based communities perceived this as an opportunity for state-funded expansion of their own services and a way to increase the reach of their beneficiary support.



Source: ADRA Ukraine

However, if this trend becomes widespread, it may entail several significant challenges. Firstly, it risks displacing the responsibility of the state as the principal duty-bearer, which should itself be providing care for conflict-affected populations as rights-holders through social workers and municipal service providers. Secondly, it could blur the wider religious and missional identity of faith communities, which may increasingly be viewed merely as service providers—now operating with taxpayers' money. This dynamic could erode the culture of solidarity and neighbourly support and reduce religious actors to merely providers of technical service and obscure their wider identity as spiritual and moral leaders embedded in their communities. Therefore, this emerging risk calls for deeper reflection on the evolving role of religious communities within Ukrainian society as a whole.

⁶ Про організацію діяльності та забезпечення функціонування центрів життєстійкості: Постанова Кабінету Міністрів України від 23 січня 2024 р. № 83 // Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

3. Responses in peacebuilding and social cohesion

Peacebuilding in the Ukrainian context during the active phase of conflict is primarily focused on strengthening internal cohesion and developing constructive mechanisms for communication and the transformation of existing tensions. While social cohesion in itself constitutes only one dimension of peacebuilding, it has currently become a central area of focus due to the anticipated post-war recovery phase and the increasing levels of fatigue and interpersonal conflict among Ukrainians today. According to respondents, they have observed the resurfacing of old conflicts—often in their more emotionally charged forms—which reinforces the understanding that this work is not only necessary but also long-term in nature. This contribution is building and strengthening the democratic culture which is needed for further level-up of interventions and their impact.

Additionally, the topics of reconciliation, mobilization, collaboration, and memorialization are hushed up in the public space – due to the fear of splits and conflicts in church and territorial communities. Although faith-based leaders are frequently asked questions pertaining to those topics, the majority of them do not know how to respond and try to avoid any kind of dialogues or discussions. In addition, questions concerning attitudes towards military service are hushed up because there are different polarities in the churches—from those who are against any service in the army (even chaplaincy is considered a sin) to those who actively join the army or actively donate and volunteer.

One of the common practices in all regions of Ukraine is prayer for an amorphous peace in general. However, there are no conversations about what it is in practice and what it should be like. When spiritual leaders avoid such conversations, they lose the opportunity to respond to existential needs of people.

Another strategic dimension of faith-based peacebuilding is addressing the topics of transitional justice, mercy, and forgiveness. Those topics also connected to the issues of collaboration and betrayal of national interests as crime against the country. In order to form a consolidated society in the post-war period, when addressing issues related to cooperation with the occupying power, amnesty, and return from captivity, it is necessary to develop a combined theological and legal framework that justifies the need for moral repentance as an important part of criminal punishment, as a variant of restorative justice (analogous to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, headed by Bishop Desmond Tutu).

As many respondents mentioned, though not in direct reference to peacebuilding work, parishes serve as inclusive meeting points for locals and IDPs: shared activities, volunteerism, and mutual aid foster trust and cooperation. Faith-rooted NGOs (e.g., Caritas, UEP, Mudra Sprava) facilitate integration programs, youth leadership, vocational training, and community dialogue. Youth work is another strength: There are NGO- and university-based youth groups, as well as parish initiatives, that run retreats, mentorship programs, and civic initiatives designed to bridge divides and cultivate leadership pipelines.

One of the biggest “taboos” that is still a limiting factor in other social activities is the development of women’s ministry and leadership. Despite remaining traditional limitations, women actively participate in and develop ministries of mercy, children’s and women’s programs,

[→ Back to contents](#)

missionary work, and various social initiatives. However, they lack recognition and to be part of decision-making processes, especially during strategic planning sessions in the case of some faith-based organizations.

Another area for future growth is addressing historical national trauma and memory, as mentioned by respondents. For national reconciliation and healing social fractures, churches must formulate positions on the Holodomor⁷, repressions, the Holocaust, and interethnic conflicts. This includes taking an active role in truth-telling, justice, and reconciliation efforts, that can start from asking for forgiveness too.



Source: NGO "Dialogue in Action"

4. Responses in mental health and psychological support

Respondents emphasize that an understanding of mental health support and psychological trauma care has long since been adopted, even within conservative religious communities. However, beyond the challenge of providing such support, several additional questions arise: How to adequately train specialists within religious communities (to what extent are professional practitioners needed, and/or when should cases be referred to external professionals?), and how to delineate the boundaries between spiritual care and mental health support.

An additional aspect concerns the issue of moral injury⁸, where pastoral care and spiritual accompaniment are in high demand. Yet, despite this need, such support remains underdeveloped and unsystematized, with only a few faith-based practitioners engaged in this work in deep involvement.

Addressing trauma requires systematic pastoral training, professional supervision, and support mechanisms to ensure competence in serving traumatized community clergy and pastors are increasingly being approached for psychological help, which is different from pastoral care only. They are becoming so-called informal psychologists. This shows the importance of projects aimed at combining mental and spiritual health, as well as training ministers and other representatives of religious communities involved in psychological assistance and the basics of psychological work in deep involvement.

As local experts mentioned, there is a distrust of foreign experts and trainers who come and teach how to work with trauma without having the experience of living through the war in Ukraine and without having experience and understanding of living in a society where faith communities

⁷ Holodomor refers to the man-made famine that occurred in Soviet Ukraine from 1932 to 1933, resulting in the deaths of millions of Ukrainians. There were several other man-made famines, also 1942-1943 and other.

⁸ Here the term of moral injury or trauma means a slightly different aspect of psychological damage, mainly caused by violation of the moral principles of human well-being, causing guilt, self-reproach and despair.

and actors are a constitutive part of the society and of the mental framework. In parallel, there are widespread calls for volunteer-chaplaincy service to the military (units, locations, hospitals), but without mass involvement in full-time [military chaplaincy](#)⁹ and [medical one](#)¹⁰, officially integrated from 2021 and 2022.

Despite a lot of MHPSS activities, there is still a need for training in crisis counseling, trauma work, burnout prevention, and leadership skills development, respondents mention. Connected to this, the biggest risk is getting more up to date: lack of personnel due to the departure of active community members; fatigue and burnout of ministers. There is an insufficient attention to the psychological toll on the clergy and volunteers themselves—the focus is mainly on helping others, stemming from an informal culture wherein you cannot stop serving others, especially during the war. There is an insufficient attention to the psychological toll on the clergy and volunteers themselves (care of caregivers) – the focus is mainly on helping others, stemming from an informal culture wherein you cannot stop serving others, especially during the war. Such practices can lead to losing experts as well as their capacity to help and it is almost impossible to replace them.

5. Responses in public theology

Public theology is still a hard topic to discuss and develop, especially in joint effort of different Christian denominations, still urgently needed by people. Although this process began in the early 2000s within church communities, since 2014—and especially after 2022—a fundamentally new vision has emerged regarding the role of the Church in relation to society and the state. The previously dominant theological framework during Soviet times, that church and religion was (or had to be) confined to the margins of society is now replaced by an understanding that church and religion is part of and engages in society.

According to respondents, interfaith cooperation is developing at the local level but is often limited to prayer and lacks a common coordination strategy. Part of the population is in an "avoidance mode": "this is not my war." There is in these circles an understanding that the church's task is to preach the Gospel, and the war is a political matter for which politicians are to blame and from which people suffer.

Theological issues affect not only the national and global church level but also local communities, where a definitive shift has taken place toward conducting services in Ukrainian. While Russian-language services (in Church Slavonic) still exist, an increasing number of local churches have voluntarily transitioned to Ukrainian liturgical language since 2022. This can be seen as a localised bottom-up contribution to building and reinforcing a culture of independence and Ukrainian identity. However, there is a lack of Ukrainian authors in sermons, literature, and worship songs. Thus, Western songs, sermons, and themes are very often translated or copied without considering the Ukrainian context.

Some churches see the war as an opportunity for spiritual awakening, but there is a risk of disappointment after the war due to a decrease in the number of attendees. This calls for a strategic transformation of the church's mission, moving away from a primary focus on mass evange-

⁹ Закон України Про Службу військового капеланства // Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine.

¹⁰ Устінов О.В. Капелан в охороні здоров'я — нова спеціальність з вищою медичною освітою // Ukrainian Medical Journal. - 2022.

lization toward strengthening the quality of church communities, thereby inviting greater member retention. Moreover, reconciliation and peacebuilding can be considered as a new churches mission as a part of national recovery.

6. Responses in advocacy

Public diplomacy and external advocacy by Ukrainian religious organizations remain fragmented and poorly synchronized, as highlighted by experts in our interviews. Despite the public positioning efforts of the AUCCRO, there is a notable absence of other consolidated voices. This lack of coordinated messaging often results in diminished understanding of Ukraine's internal context among international partners and fosters a sense of disconnection between key spiritual actors operating within the country.

The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO) is criticized by being too declarative and not acting enough on international level as joint force for promoting Ukrainian interests. Still, they serve as most visible and united inter-religious platform, recognized by both national and international stakeholders. On the level of different religious organizations and units, they mainly advocate for their own needs and partners abroad, not always taken seriously by secular donors.

Special attention can be paid to Protestant Ukrainian communities. Because many of them are funded by US churches that are loyal to Trump and his policies, there is a certain dichotomy - on the one hand, the Ukrainian partners support Trump and his policies on family, migrants, and the inclusion of religion in social and political life, and on the other, they understand that his shifting attitude towards Ukraine is problematic, and therefore struggle to reconcile those two aspects. Despite these dilemmas, Ukrainian Evangelical communities have strengthened their engagement with international platforms through interaction with the Lausanne Movement, the World Evangelical Alliance, and other global forums.

A strong priority should be the advocacy for religious freedom and documentation of religious persecution in occupied territories as directly connected to the religious affairs topics. It is essential to continue this work in coordination with international public reports and partnerships with relevant global organizations. The issues around FoRB can also provoke discussions, like around UOC (ex Moscow Patriarchate) church taken as security risk.

One of the shared concerns raised during closed interreligious meetings of key actors in the field of social service remains the call for recognition of religious organizations in the eyes of secular foundations and donor institutions. It is still common practice to reject applications from any religious actor for general grant programs, due to presumed biases or concerns about impartiality. At the same time, many of these organizations operate in full compliance with the highest international standards and demonstrate readiness to implement programs responsibly - while remaining true to their spiritual identity.

There are some bright examples of local advocacy missions done by faith-based actors. They mainly focus on the rights and needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable people, as well as on special issues (like rehabilitation from addictions work, whole cycle of support for people with disabilities or shelters for the victims of domestic violence). Here local and regional FBOs play a special role advocating for people in need as those who help them when even government cannot make it.

[→ Back to contents](#)

IV. WHAT NEEDS ADDRESSING TO STRENGTHEN THE CONTRIBUTION OF FAITH-BASED ACTORS

1. Strategic changes in the programming

The previous style of strategic planning and projects design, and, especially in humanitarian aid, is not working efficiently anymore. As our experts mentioned in interviews, they hope for a more flexible system of project management with partnership mode but not only service providers; additionally, they would appreciate having more long-term projects with high level of flexibility so it helps to minimize all risks that emerge during the active phase of war.

Localization as part of organizational development and trust-building would be crucial in upcoming years. Faith actors are inherently local – embedded in and often mobilisers of the local communities. It is especially important to understand what keep Ukrainian and international partners together despite financial demands and how they can fruitfully contribute to each other. In church administration, the culture of authoritarianism and vertical hierarchy still exists and mirrors Ukrainian authority in general, which hinders rapid change and adaptation to challenges. A proper model of cooperation with international partners will also have a long-term impact on intra-Ukrainian culture, so it is important to support it and make it transparent, as well as to support local ownership.

One of the key challenges remains the absence of a strategic vision for humanitarian development for various actors (INGOs, clusters, national and local partners). Most communities operate in emergency response mode and lack a clear transition plan from material aid to also inclusion of systemic psychological and spiritual support. There is strong demand for training programs in crisis counseling, trauma care, burnout prevention, and leadership development. HDP nexus is highly needed as practical shift in project design process. However, interfaith coordination platforms are insufficient for effective collaboration and resource optimization.

International financial assistance could be redirected not only toward immediate humanitarian needs but also toward more in-depth psychosocial and spiritual counselling initiatives. Work with memory and reconciliation—such as facilitated dialogues, joint memorial events, and deradicalization-oriented initiatives—can serve as a valuable societal resource. More suggestions follow below.



Source: NGO "Dialogue in Action"

[→ Back to contents](#)

2. Possible changes in public theology and advocacy

The focus on theology and advocacy mechanisms and messages for advancing and fostering change is a pivotal process that has the potential to transform both the organizational approach and collaborative culture of religious institutions. Advocacy in this context refers not only to promoting new practices and approaches outwardly—to national, state, or international partners—but also to embedding these standards through internal implementation. For example, understanding why transparent reporting is an ethical principle, and why communication with partners should extend beyond mere self-promotion.

Regarding theology, developing this dimension will shape the fundamental identity of religious organizations and communities, providing the spiritual basis for interpreting emerging trends. Such theological work may occur at the level of individual organizations or communities, yet it can achieve greater impact if the church hierarchy is involved and if common lines of rupture, challenges, and dilemmas are openly discussed.

Ukrainian religious identity is built mainly through antagonism — not Russians, not LGBT, not the Russian church. There is a weak emphasis on finding one's own identity, not an oppositional one. However, they lack time and sometimes willingness to start the process of constructing a positive-based identity.

More connected to the war context, Evangelical churches must develop nuanced theological frameworks for "just defense" that do not marginalize sincere pacifist convictions. Ethical and pastoral guidance is needed for believers with varying views on military service.

In addition, churches should not avoid public discourse on abuses in military enlistment centers. A transparent and coherent position on alternative service and pastoral care for those facing moral dilemmas is essential. Even those steps would make a big shift and enable the level of trust from secular actors to rise and increase safety among faith-based ones. Furthermore, it is in the interests of religious organizations themselves to increase pressure on the state to improve state-confessional policy, ensure legislative transparency on issues such as alternative service during martial law and war, the mobilization of clergy, and a number of other issues. Unfortunately, these issues often remain a "grey area" of law enforcement, allowing authorities at various levels to act arbitrarily, which leads to increased division between different religious organizations and between the secular and religious parts of Ukrainian society (such as granting religious organizations the status of "critical to the economy and the livelihood of the population during a special period," similar to defense industry enterprises, which results in clergy receiving deferrals from mobilization, but causes outrage among the secular part of society).

3. Opportunities in peacebuilding and social cohesion

A critical attitude towards the UOC (ex-MP) prevails, with the entire community being branded as "zhduny" (those who are waiting for Russians to come) or potential collaborators. This intra-Orthodox conflict has grown into national dividing line, not only about Christianity but more about national identity and cultural protest, still needed to be mediated. Although this conflict may remain in the background for some religious communities, it points to a critical gap in

[→ Back to contents](#)

Ukraine's strategic understanding of peacebuilding: the need to foster a culture of dialogue and the capacity to overcome adversity. Drawing from our practical experience, we recognize that transparent communication and restorative practices—whether implemented at the level of small or large communities—will form the bedrock for a smoother transition during the postwar recovery period.

In this context, faith actors are uniquely positioned to serve as key providers of such a culture, offering both their communities and individual expertise as safe spaces for addressing conflicts and social tensions. In doing so, they significantly expand the scope and depth of their social ministry.

Despite the emphasis that many international organisations have placed on social cohesion, the concept is still often misapplied—frequently reduced to isolated communication trainings that yield limited results. If this approach is to serve as a foundation for deepening existing programs or developing new ones, it is critical to adopt a more tailormade application. For instance, humanitarian projects could intentionally incorporate activities aimed at fostering social cohesion, embedding additional value-based elements of collaboration into smaller-scale initiatives, and emphasizing shared principles throughout implementation.

Equally important, however, is the integration of a full cycle of conflict-sensitive analysis at all stages and levels of programming—beginning from the ideation phase through to the evaluation of completed projects. Embedding such a cycle as a routine internal practice, rather than creating artificial or bureaucratic departments, would help reduce the potential harm of interventions and foster the development of new, adaptive practices. These practices would not only mitigate risks but also leverage opportunities that emerge from a more context-sensitive and ethically informed approach.



Source: NGO "Dialogue in Action"

[→ Back to contents](#)

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[→ Back to contents](#)

ADDITION 1

ANNEX: TABLE AND PROFILES OF KEY FAITH-BASED STAKEHOLDERS

		Members and numbers	Geographic strongholds	Key features + specificities – maybe including public advocacy issues
Interreligious	AUCCRO	14 main members – registered religious organizations	all Ukraine	e.g. their mandate and strong role in public diplomacy and state relations
	Assembly of Christian Churches (a branch of AUCCRO affiliated)	11	all Ukraine	Additional to AUCCRO only Christian group to work on policies and state relations mainly. Was organized separately to have only inter-Christian dialogue.
Christian	Orthodox Church in Ukraine (OCU)	8511 parishes (together with those which transferred from UOC)	All Ukraine now but more wide presence in Lviv, Ternopil, Volyn, Kyiv and Poltava regions	Main website: https://www.pomisna.info/uk/
	Ukrainian Orthodox Church, ex-Moscow Patriarchate (UOC)	10118	All Ukraine, more centered in Kyiv, Eastern and Southern Ukraine and Transcarpatia	Main website: https://church.ua/
	Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate	300	Kyiv mainly and some abroad	Officially stopped registration by the state but actively working with Patriarch Filaret on the lead. Another branch of Orthodox church which was before OCU creation and saved some of priests and bishops after with leading patriarch Filaret.
	Roman Catholic Church (RCC)	1130	All Ukraine and more in Lviv, Khmelnytsky and Vinnytsia regions	Official website: https://rkc.org.ua/
	Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC)	3674	Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil regions	
	Stavropihiya Mission of Ecumenical Patriarchate in Ukraine	1	Kyiv as center of diplomatic representation at st. Andrew Church	Official page: https://www.facebook.com/stavropigianua/
	Christian Rescue Service		Mentioned as all Ukraine	Main website: https://crs-center.org/
	Bible Society		All-Ukrainian coverage	Main website: https://www.ukrbs.org/ . Unites all main Christian denominations for joint projects and mainly Bible translation and publishing.
	Institute of Trauma Healing		All Ukraine	Develop and provide spiritual care and MHPSS programs for different Christian organizations. Main website: https://healing.v.ua/
	Caritas Spes		Mainly Transcarpatia, Western Ukraine and central + Odesa office	Wide humanitarian aid and psychological support of the Roman Catholic Church, main website: https://caritas-spes.org/

ADDITION:

ANNEX: TABLE AND PROFILES OF KEY FAITH-BASED STAKEHOLDERS

		Members and numbers	Geographic strongholds	Key features + specificities – maybe including public advocacy issues
Christian	Ukrainian Humanitarian Institute		Kyiv region, Bucha	Main educational center of the Adventist church which is widely integrated into the educational system and progressive in its programming. Main page: https://ugi.edu.ua/
	German Evangelical-Lutheran church in Ukraine	8	Mainly Eastern Ukraine with big centers in Kyiv, Kharkiv and Odesa	Main page: https://nelcu.org.ua/ . Member of the Lutheran World Federation
	Ukrainian Lutheran Church	26		Main page: https://ukrlc.blogspot.com/p/blog-page_30.html
	Mormon Church in Ukraine		Main center in Kyiv	Main page: https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/?lang=ukr
	Adventist Church in Ukraine	976	All Ukraine	Main page: https://adventist.ua/
	ADRA Ukraine	300	All Ukraine	Main charitable foundation created by Adventist Church. Main page: https://www.adra.ua/
	Eleos Ukraine	15	All Ukraine	Main humanitarian and social projects and service provider as a part of OCU service. Main page: https://eleos.com.ua/
	Prosvita (educational & cultural society linked with UGCC communities)			Focus on national identity, language, culture, and moral-spiritual education within UGCC parishes
	Knights of Columbus			Major humanitarian arm of UGCC; food, shelter, psychosocial support; international Caritas network
	Caritas Ukraine		All Ukraine	Major humanitarian arm of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic church (UGCC); food, shelter, psychosocial support; international Caritas network
	Ukrainian Educational Platform (UEP)		Mainly Lviv, Dnipro, Mykolayiv and Kharkiv regions with other joining	Partner NGO rooted in UGCC; focuses on education, youth empowerment, capacity-building for civil society, humanitarian aid
	Mudra Sprava		National NGO with dozens of projects	Ukraine-wide, esp. in war-affected regions. Founded by UGCC activists; provides humanitarian aid, psychosocial support, advocacy for IDPs and vulnerable groups

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		Members and numbers	Geographic strongholds	Key features + specificities – maybe including public advocacy issues
Christian	MHPSS Hub Diyaty		Lviv and other regions	
Islam	RAMU	55 (more than half of the pre-war number – about 60 communities – remained in the occupied territory of the Kherson region)	Poltava, Odesa, Mykolaiv, Kherson regions	The biggest Ukrainian umma with leading Sheikh Akhmed Tamim, which unites a lot of national minorities. Closely linked to Sufi networks.
	RAM ARC	6		Closely associated with the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars
	RAMU-Ummah	23 (One-third of these communities (8) are located in the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions and are effectively non-functional.)		Closely linked to the international network of the Muslim Brotherhood
Judaism	JCU			
Etc.				