

The Impact of War on Christian Communities of Ukraine (Based on Materials from the Religion on Fire Project)*

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This article is based on the data collected by the Religion on Fire project team, implemented by the Workshop for the Academic Study of Religions (Ukraine). The article explores the impact of the full-scale Russian invasion on the Christian communities living in Ukraine, with a focus on damaged and destroyed religious buildings as well as kidnapped and murdered religious leaders. It also documents the changes in religious communities which have taken place since the beginning of the full-scale war in 2022. This article focuses primarily on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Roman and Greek Catholics, and numerous Protestant denominations.

Keywords: War in Ukraine, Christian Churches, Religious Buildings, Religious Communities, Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Protestant Churches.

Introduction

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine launched by the Russian Federation on February 24, 2022 has had a tremendous impact on all spheres of

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Ukrainian civil life. Religion is one of the chief domains of public and private life in the majority of modern societies, including Ukraine. It is therefore unsurprising that the war has profoundly affected the country's religious communities in a variety of ways. This article is one of many scholarly attempts to show how the Russian invasion has affected these communities, specifically the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Roman and Greek Catholics and various Protestant denominations. The analysis is based primarily on the information collected by the *Religion on Fire* project, which has been run by the *Workshop for the Academic Study of Religions* since March 2022.

The *Religion on Fire* project uses open-source data to record and document the damage done to religious buildings as a result of military actions conducted by the Russian army in Ukraine, as well as the killing, wounding and abduction of religious leaders of various denominations. The collected materials may be used in future studies of the war's impact on the country's religious, in preparing reports for international organizations, and as evidence to bring the aggressor to justice. The collected data is regularly published on the *Religion on Fire* project's official website,¹ which has about three hundred cases of damaged and destroyed religious buildings since February 24, 2022.

In order to present an adequate description of the current situation, we will first briefly describe the diversity of the religious landscape in Ukraine. Then we will describe the damage to and destruction of religious buildings of Christian denominations during the war, and how this has affected the functioning of religious communities in the country. We will present specific cases to help illustrate the level of damage at hand, with special attention also paid to the kidnapping and murder of Ukrainian religious leaders. The complexities of the war have changed the day-to-day activities of religious organizations, and further research will be needed to determine whether the observed changes will become integral to the functioning of religious communities in Ukraine or if they will cease after the war.

¹ NGO Workshop of Academic Study of Religion, "Religion on Fire," https://en.religiononfire.mar.in.ua/wiki/Main_Page, accessed June 10, 2023.

The diversity of Christian denominations in Ukraine

Historically, the vast majority of the Ukrainian population has belonged to Christian traditions, primarily Orthodox. According to surveys today, most respondents identify themselves with Orthodoxy (62.7% in wartime 2022,² 60% in more typical 2021³).⁴ Some 8.8% identified as Greek Catholics in 2021, along with about 0.8% identifying as Roman Catholics, and 1.5% as Evangelicals. In addition, there is a separate category of “just Christians”, representing 8.5% of respondents in 2021. Though most of the Christians in Ukraine belong to Orthodoxy, there is no single Church which holds a monopoly on this denomination. A 2021 report showed that 12,406 organizations belonged to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC-MP), whereas the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) brought together 7,188 organizations.⁵ Catholicism in Ukraine is primarily made up of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (3,670 organizations), the Mukachevo Greek Catholic Diocese (474 organizations), and Roman Catholic Church (1,132 organizations). The biggest Evangelical denominations include the All-Ukrainian Union of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists (2,689 organizations), Ukrainian Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith (1,784 organizations), Ukrainian Union Conference of Churches of Seventh Day Adventists (1,038 organizations), and Jehovah’s Witnesses (928 organizations). This picture of religious pluralism is unusual both for the post-Soviet space and for Europe, more closely resembling that of the USA.⁶ Since the Russian invasion, the sit-

² Razumkov Centre, “War and Church. Church and Religious Situation in Ukraine 2022,” https://razumkov.org.ua/images/2023/02/13/2022_Religiya_ENGL.pdf, accessed June 10, 2023.

³ Idem, “Specifics of Religious and Church Self-Determination of Citizens of Ukraine: Trends 2000–2021,” https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_Religiya_eng.pdf, accessed June 10, 2023.

⁴ 2021 is the last year before the full-scale Russian invasion, and thus the most relevant. The number and composition of the population as well as its distribution across the territory of Ukraine have changed so dramatically since 2022 that it would not be accurate to compare data before and after this point. In addition, it is currently impossible to conduct a representative study in the country’s warzones.

⁵ “Zvit pro merezhu relihiinykh orhanizatsii v Ukraini stanom na 1 sichnia 2021 roku [Report on the Religious Network in Ukraine],” <https://dess.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Form1-2021-public3.xls>, accessed June 10, 2023.

⁶ Tymofii Brik and José Casanova, “Thirty years of religious pluralism in Ukraine,” in *From “the Ukraine” to Ukraine. A Contemporary History, 1991–2021*, eds. Mykhailo Minakov, Georgiy Kasianov and Matthew Rojansky (Stuttgart: ibidem, 2021), 249–82.

uation has changed drastically: about 6.3 million Ukrainians have fled the country,⁷ new diaspora communities have appeared,⁸ and several hundred Orthodox communities have changed their affiliation from the UOC to the OCU.

Research on the topic of war and religion in Ukraine

The war in Ukraine started not on February 24, 2022, but in 2014, as did the research on the impact of Russian military activities and of the occupation of Donbass and Crimea by the Russian Federation on the religious life in these regions of Ukraine.

In one such study, the authors identify two tendencies in the attitude of the Russian occupiers towards religious communities. The first, which lasted from February 2014 until February 2022, was to favor the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in the occupied territories while banning certain groups and organizations, among them Jehovah's Witnesses. The second, which began with the full-scale invasion in 2022 and is ongoing, is the destruction of religious buildings and the killing of clergy and believers.⁹ A similar claim is expressed by Valeriy Bulatov, who emphasizes Russia's agenda of destroying the identity of culture of the Ukrainian people by suppressing their spiritual values and their desire for freedom.¹⁰

⁷ UNHCR, "Ukraine Refugee Situation. Operational Data Portal," <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>. accessed June 10, 2023.

⁸ More information on new parishes can be found here: "Pomisnyi Sobor: UPTs vidkryie novi parafii za kordonom [Local Council: UOC will open new parishes abroad]," <https://spzh.news/ua/news/88710-pomestnyj-sobor-upc-otkrojet-novyje-prihody-za-granicej>, accessed June 10, 2023; "Cherez viinu. PTsU pochno provodyty sluzhby v Yevropi, a takozh na Rizdvo 25 hrudnia [Because of the war. OCU will start holding services in Europe, as well as on Christmas Day, December 25]," <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/news-63308402>, accessed June 10, 2023; "Persha v Slovachchyni ukrainska ptyadesiatnytska tserkva vidznachyla richnytsiu [The first Ukrainian Pentecostal church in Slovakia celebrated its anniversary]," <https://www.chve.org.ua/slovachchyna-1-cerkva-1rik/>, accessed June 10, 2023.

⁹ Oksana Vysoven, Yuriya Figurnyi, Valentina Molotkina and Nina Brehunets, "Repressive Policy of the Occupiers During Hybrid War Against Religious Communities of Ukraine, 2014–2022," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* XLII, 6 (July 2022): 14–35.

¹⁰ Valeriy Bulatov, "«Terrorist Design» of the Russian Federation in the Destruction of Churches in Ukraine from 2014 to 2023," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* XLIII, 7 (August 2023): 98–110.

Special scholarly attention has also been given to the religious justification of Russian aggression towards Ukraine and in particular the role of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in this dynamic. German theologians Regina Elsner and Thomas Bremer thoroughly analyze contemporary Russian Orthodoxy and its relationship with state authorities, as well as the theological and historical factors influencing its involvement in the socio-political processes of the Russian Federation and the ongoing war. Reflecting on the positioning of the Russian Orthodox Church in the post-Soviet space, Elsner points out the various concepts used by the ROC to justify its “interpretive sovereignty.” Among them, the most important are the concepts of “Holy Rus”, “canonical territory” and “the Russian world”, which have had different religious justifications, content and geographical distribution.¹¹ As we have seen during the war, these narratives have been deployed in order to legitimize Russia’s military actions against Ukraine.

Ukrainian researcher Anatoliy Babynsky traces the interconnection of these concepts and proves that the historical development of the concept of “Holy Rus” formed the basis of the ideology of the “Russian world”: “After the collapse of the USSR, the mythology of “Holy Rus” was proposed by the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church... This idea had a deep history and emphasized Russia’s special mission in the world, and was to become the ideological foundation for the reintegration of the post-Soviet space, where the ROC retained a dominant role.”¹²

Another well-known sociologist of religion, Jose Casanova, also draws attention to the idea of the “Russian world” and identifies two components within it. The first is the sacralization of Holy Rus as the territory of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, a stance legitimizing the right to spread the influence of the Orthodox Church - specifically the Russian Orthodox Church - across this territory. The second component is the positioning

¹¹ Regina Elsner, “Diskurse über Krieg und Frieden: Die Rolle der Orthodoxie im Russischen Angriffskrieg auf die Ukraine,” *Ethik und Gesellschaft* 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.18156/eug-1-2023-art-3>.

¹² Anatoliy Babynski, “Viina za «Russkyi Myr» chy «Sviatu Rus»? ideolohichni koreni rosiiskoi ahresii [War for «Russian word» or «holy Rus? Ideological roots of the Russian aggression],” https://nz-theology.ucu.edu.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/07_babynskyi_225-251.pdf, accessed November 1, 2023.

of the Holy Rus as a civilization designed to spread traditional Christian values in opposition to the Western liberal world.¹³

The issue of the instrumentalization of Orthodoxy and the dangers posed by the ideology of the “Russian world” has also been studied by Ukrainian scholars such as Liudmyla Fylypovych and Oksana Horkusha. One important aspect of their work concerns how the worldview of the “Russian world” has been formulated and transmitted through religious preaching, cultic and ritual activities, and the communication channels of the Russian Orthodox Church and its structures in Ukraine.¹⁴

Another group of Ukrainian scholars led by Valentyn Krysachenko have defined four levels of participation of the ROC in the war in Ukraine: 1) organizational participation by blessing the Russian military and supporting the occupation; 2) repressive participation through banning religious freedoms in occupied territories; 3) material participation through the appropriation of Ukrainian church property and territories; 4) psychological participation through creating social tensions and the atmosphere of fear.¹⁵

Since Russia launched its full-scale invasion, Ukrainian religious studies scholars have devoted special attention to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). The majority of such publications have condemned not only the activities of this Church, but also its very existence on Ukrainian territory, a sentiment reflected in legislative initiatives from the Ukrainian authorities to ban the UOC-MP completely.¹⁶

¹³ “Casanova Lecture Empire and Violence,” <https://www.discoursesofmassviolence.komparatistik.uni-muenchen.de/events/lecture-series1/casanova-lecture1/index.html>, accessed November 1, 2023.

¹⁴ Oksana Horkusha, “Terminolohichnyi front: «Russkii mir» v relihiino-konfesiinii ry-torytsi (relihiieznavcha pertseptsiiia ekzystentsiinoho vyboru)” [“Terminological Front: «Russian World» in Religious and Confessional Rhetorics (religious studies perception of the existential choice)”], *Filosofska Dumka* 1 (2023): 25–44.

¹⁵ Valentyn Krysachenko, Alina Zadorozhnyia, Yulia Lebedeva and Yuriy Figurnyi, “Russian Orthodox Church as Apologist for the Current Russian Aggression,” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* XLIII, 4 (May 2023): 1–19.

¹⁶ There are several competing draft laws aimed at banning or at least restricting the UOC (MP) functioning in Ukraine. The most relevant one was prepared by the Government – Draft Law № 8371 on Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Regarding Activities of Religious Organizations in Ukraine (<https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/Card/41219>). It is supported by almost all fractions in the Ukrainian Parliament, and it is waiting for its second reading as for the middle of December 2023. For more details see: Thomas Mark Németh, “Russlands Krieg gegen die Ukraine - eine Herausforderung für die Orthodoxie”, in „Nicht Konkurrenten sondern Brüder...“ Auf

Scholars have examined the attempt of the UOC-MP to distance itself from the ROC, expressed in the Decree of the Council of the UOC-MP issued on May 22, 2022, and have argued that the “declarative independence from the MP does not change the pro-Russian vector of the essence of the activities of the UOC-MP”.¹⁷ More extreme cases of anti-UOC-MP rhetoric can be found in an article by Figurnyi et al.¹⁸ where the authors explore how the UOC-MP has contributed to the introduction of the doctrine of the “Russian world” into Ukrainian society, describing this and similar activities as “criminal”.¹⁹ Some scholars accuse the UOC-MP of conducting an “information war in the religious sphere” and have used the pertinent case of Kyiv Pechersk Lavra²⁰ to prove that the UOC-MP is disseminating pro-Russian propaganda among its believers.²¹ This scholarship also examines some Protestant Churches for

dem Weg zu einem neuen Miteinander von orthodoxer und katholischer Kirche. Schriften des Ostkircheninstituts der Diözese Regensburg 9, ed. Dietmar Schon (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet Verlag 2023), 11–31.

¹⁷ Valentyna Kuryliak and Bogdan Synchak, “Reasons for the Rupture of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with the Moscow Patriarchate against the Backdrop of the War in Ukraine 2022,” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* XLII, 7 (Sept 2022): 24–38.

¹⁸ Yuriy Figurnyi, Oksana Semenova, Liubov Otroshko and Olha Shakurova, “Development of the Ukrainian Orthodoxy in the Conditions of the Revanchist Policy of the Russian Federation against Ukraine,” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* XLII, 4 (May 2022): 27–46.

¹⁹ From the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the Secret Service of Ukraine has opened 68 criminal proceedings against clergymen of the UOC (MP). The majority of the accusations are treason, collaborationism, justification of Russian aggression, production and distribution of the symbols of the Russian Federation, and violation of human equality. As the SSU speaker stated, “dozens” of charges were confirmed, <https://meta.ua/uk/news/video/94031-derzhzrada-i-ne-tilki-v-sbu-rozpovili-pro-zlochyniduhovenstva-upts-mp/>, accessed November 1, 2023.

²⁰ Yaroslav Stotskiy, “Ukrainofobiia Moskovskoho Pravoslav’ia: politychnyi dyskurs [Ukrainophobism of the Moscow Orthodoxy: A Political Discourse],” in *The Religious Factor and Its Use in Modern Hybrid Warfare: Collection of Materials of the Round Table Discussion* (Ternopil, Ivan Pulyuy Technical University, November 18, 2022), eds. Andriy Kryskov and M. Blavitsky (Ternopil, Palyanytsia, 2022): 67–73.

²¹ Bohdan Synchak, Yurii Yelisovenko and Svitlana Romanchuk, “Information War in the Religious Sphere in the Context of the «Battle» for the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra,” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* XLIII, 7 (August 2023): 68–85.

their “pro-Russian” position,²² although not all scholars agree on this characterization.²³

Most relevant to this article is the research documenting the impact of the war on Christian communities and the ways in which religious organizations have drastically altered their routine activities since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. Vitalii Turenko²⁴ has conducted a rigorous study of the social mission of the two major Ukrainian Orthodox Churches (UOC-MP and OCU) in the context of the Russian invasion. He argues that both churches condemned the full-scale war and called on their believers to contribute to the war effort. Between February and August 2022, both churches helped the military and civilians in a variety of ways, such as through the purchase of weapons, the provision of basic necessities and food, evacuation from dangerous cities, the creation of support centers, etc. Despite these facts, however, the UOC-MP is still generally looked upon with contempt by Ukrainian society.

Lutsan and Horokholinska²⁵ have conducted a survey among the clergy in the country’s western regions, where the physical damage from military actions is less visible than in the east. The 436 respondents in that survey represent various Christian denominations functioning in Ukraine: The Orthodox Church of Ukraine, The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, The Roman Catholic Church, Seventh-Day Adventists, The Ukrainian Church of the Christian Faith of the Evangelical Faith, The All-Ukrainian Union of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists. The scholars identify three important issues mentioned by the survey respondents: 1) the theoretical and practical implementation of the institute of chaplaincy in Ukrainian army; 2) the contribution of religious communities to the general all-Ukrainian volunteer movement; and 3)

²² Pavlo Pavlenko, “Yevraziiska matrytsia postradianskoho protestantyzmu, yii vyiavy v suchasni Ukraini” [“Eurasian Matrix of Post-Soviet Protestantism, its Expressions in Modern Ukraine”], https://risu.ua/jevrazijska-matricya-postradyanskogo-protestantizmuyiyi-viyavi-v-suchasnij-ukrayini_n135575, accessed November 1, 2023.

²³ Valentyna Kuryliak, “The Position of Ukrainian Protestants Regarding the War in Ukraine: Rebuttal of False Accusations of Eurasianism,” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* XLIII, 7 (August 2023): 166–80.

²⁴ Vitalii Turenko, “Social Mission of Orthodox Churches in the Conditions of 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine,” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* XLIII, 2 (February 2023): 1–16.

²⁵ Ihor Lutsan and Iryna Horokholinska, “Clergy Social Activity During War Conditions: The Case of Western Regions of Ukraine,” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* XLII, 8 (Oct 2022): 39–60.

the urgency of moral and psychological rehabilitation for their believers, and the ability of ministers to provide appropriate spiritual care.

Another publication explores the social activity of three Ukrainian Protestant Churches during the war: Pentecostalists, Evangelical Christian Baptists, and Seventh-Day Adventists.²⁶ The author argues that their activities “have acquired a multi-vector orientation”, because alongside their traditional missionary work and charity, they are also involved in volunteer movements providing assistance to the Ukrainian army, developing need-based services for the military, and offering social and psychological rehabilitation with a spiritual orientation for soldiers returning from the front. Studying the volunteer work of the Seventh-Day Adventists, Valentyna Kuryliak observes two main orientations in their work: the “professional” carried out by specially trained believers, which is based on charity and aims to provide assistance to victims of the war, and the more controversial “non-professional” approach, which mixes humanitarian aid with the preaching of Adventist teachings and in fact undermining the policies of the Church.²⁷

Taking into account the body of literature mentioned above, the data presented in this article will show that Ukrainian scholars have overlooked some of the major changes in the activities of Christian communities in Ukraine, especially in regions subject to occupation or military action. The destruction and damage wrought to the religious buildings belonging to these communities, as well as the murdering, wounding and abduction of their religious leaders, has resulted in shifts far more profound than minor or temporary adjustments to the services and volunteer work provided by these churches.

Damaged and destroyed religious buildings of Christian denominations

Since February 24, 2022, Ukraine has endured military actions, territorial occupation by Russian troops, and continuous air attacks nationwide. According to The Kyiv School of Economics, the total amount of damage

²⁶ Ihor Lutsan, “Models of Social Activity of Protestant Churches in the Context of Russia of Russia’s Military Aggression Against Ukraine,” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* XLIII, 8 (Sept 2023): 34–63.

²⁷ Valentyna Kuryliak, “The Adventist Development and Relief Agency in the Conditions of War in Ukraine”, *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* XLIII, 1 (Jan 2023): 94–100.

caused to Ukraine's infrastructure due to the war was almost \$138 billion as of December 2022.²⁸ Both housing and industrial infrastructure have suffered severe damage. In state statistics, religious buildings are not distinctly categorized, and thus blend in with other cultural entities such as museums, sport facilities and tourist attractions, therefore *Religion on Fire* focuses specifically on religious objects. It is crucial to underline that we define "religious buildings," as any space where religious rituals are carried out or that bear significance for a specific religious community. This includes not only venues for regular religious services, but also cemeteries or memorials where believers conduct pilgrimages, former Jewish synagogues (which represent the formerly numerous presences of the Jewish community throughout Ukraine's history) and religious educational institutions, which guarantee the future of a certain religion by training young religious leaders capable of uniting and guiding the community in the future.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the database for the *Religion on Fire* project has a diversified list of religious affiliations which provide the public with a clear idea of the diversity and richness of Ukraine's religious landscape. This is why we record data on The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), The Orthodox Church of Ukraine, The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, Roman Catholicism, Greek Catholicism, Evangelical Christian-Baptists, Christians of Evangelical Faith, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mennonites, and other Christian religious communities separately.

As of Nov 1, 2023 at least 491 religious buildings were damaged or destroyed in the course of military actions, shelling, and occupation. The majority of these buildings (250) belong to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). That damaging and destruction of the churches of the UOC, an autonomous part of the Russian Orthodox Church, contradicts Putin's rhetoric about "shared spirituality" and Ukraine being a "brotherly nation", but it confirms the narrative of Patriarch Kirill, who not only sees Ukraine as "dominated" by "evil Western values", but characterizes the Ukrainian situation as a "schism".²⁹

²⁸ Kyiv School of Economics, "The total amount of damage caused to Ukraine's infrastructure due to the war has increased to almost \$138 billion," <https://bit.ly/3sIpSI8>, accessed June 10, 2023.

²⁹ Andrii Krawchuk, "Narrating the war theologically: does Russian Orthodoxy have a future in Ukraine?," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 64, no. 2–3 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1>

It would be reasonable to assume that the churches of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine would suffer more damage and destruction because of its distinctive anti-Russian and pro-Ukrainian position, but that is not the case: the *Religion on Fire* database shows only 36 such cases.

The religious group with the second largest number of damaged and destroyed religious buildings (159) comprises various Protestant denominations, including Evangelical Christian Baptists, Christians of Evangelical Faith, Mennonites, as well as Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists. This can be partly attributed to the geography of military actions, which have mostly taken place in the Eastern and Southern parts of Ukraine, especially in the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv regions. The total number of damaged or destroyed religious buildings in these regions is 225 (Donetsk – 102, Luhansk – 62, and Kharkiv – 61), constituting 46% of all the damaged and destroyed religious buildings in the country. As for other Christian denominations, *Religion on Fire* documented 8 cases of damage and destruction of Roman Catholic buildings, and 5 Greek Catholic buildings.

Comparing the number of damaged and destroyed religious buildings with the total number of religious buildings of the same religious organizations as of January 2021, it is evident that the impact of military actions and shelling varies across different religious organizations: the smaller the organization, the more damage is done to it by the destruction of one or more religious buildings. For example, the total number of churches of UOC-MP in Ukraine is about 11,270,³⁰ and 250 damaged or destroyed buildings constitute only 2% of the total amount. The OUC has 5,351, of which the 40 damaged or destroyed structures represent only 0.7%. As for Roman Catholic churches and religious building, only 0.9% were damaged or destroyed (8), while the Greek Catholic Church saw damage or destruction in only 0.1% (5) of its buildings. In contrast, Jehovah's Witnesses had only 338 religious buildings in Ukraine, but about 79 are damaged, constituting 23% of the total (see Table 1).

080/00085006.2022.2107836.

³⁰ "Yevraziiska matrytsia postradianskoho protestantyzmu, yii vyiavy v suchasni Ukraini" ["Eurasian Matrix of Post-Soviet Protestantism, its Expressions in Modern Ukraine"], <https://dess.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Zvit-pro-zabezpechenist-molytovnymy-prymishchenniamy-Form2-2022.xlsx>, accessed June 10, 2023.

Religious Organization	Total quantity of religious buildings	Quantity of damaged or destructed	% of total
Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)	11,270	250	2%
Orthodox Church of Ukraine	5,351	40	0.7%
Roman Catholic Church of Ukraine	666	8	0.9%
Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church	1,911	5	0.1%
Evangelical Christian Baptists	1,316	45	3.4%
Christians of Evangelical Faith	1,170	4	0.3%
Mennonites	2	2	100%
Seventh Day Adventists	603	20	3.3%
Jehovah's Witnesses	338	79	23%
Other Protestants	1,503	9	0.5%
Total for Protestants	4,932	159	3.22%
Other religions (Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and others)	273	29	10%
TOTAL	29,335	491	1.7%

Table 1: Quantity of Damaged and Destroyed Religious Buildings in Ukraine (as of Nov 1, 2023)

The research team of the *Religion on Fire* project believes that the extent of damage and destruction faced by small Christian religious organizations in Ukraine directly correlates with the diminishing likelihood of their ability to resume previous activities. In spite of the social cohesion and provision of assistance from abroad by fellow believers, some regions of Ukraine, especially those under occupation, will not recover their religious diversity. The damage and destruction of religious buildings is not the only factor affecting the life of such communities. Other crucial factors which are not covered by the *Religion on Fire* project but are worth

mentioning include the relocation of foreign missionaries and pastors from Ukraine to their home countries, as well as the migration of families with children to other regions of Ukraine or abroad. The combined influence of these factors may well have an adverse effect on the future of religious diversity of Ukraine, often regarded as a safeguard for the state's democratic development.

As mentioned above, the majority of religious buildings in Ukraine, as well as the majority of religious organizations, belong to Christian denominations. According to governmental statistics, in 2021 only 711 of 30,245 religious buildings (including secular buildings adapted for prayers) were affiliated with non-Christian denominations.³¹ That is why it has not been a surprise that most of the damaged and destroyed religious buildings are also Christian. Additionally, one should understand that many of the damaged churches and prayer houses became shelters and volunteer hubs providing free meals, heating and electricity to members of their communities and their neighbors. Thus, it is relevant to look in detail at some cases where not only the building was destroyed but a significant aspect of the local community's life disappeared after the shelling of the structure.

Holy Dormition Sviatohirsk Lavra – one of the three main monasteries of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (MP) in Ukraine – became a refuge hub for internally displaced people well before February 24, 2022. Starting in 2014, residents of the Donetsk region whose houses were destroyed or under the control of the Russian army sought shelter there. By March 2022, several hundred civilians, including children, lived in the monastery. However, on March 12, 2022, the hotels for pilgrims which housed internally displaced people near the Lavra's entrance, were among the first buildings damaged when Russian aircraft bombed the bridge crossing the Siverskyi Donets River near the monastery. A blast wave shattered the windows and doors of the hotels, and simultaneously damaged the church of St. John the Russian and a marble statue of the Virgin Mary. Since May of 2022, various structures on the territory of the Lavra and sketes in neighboring settlements have been repeatedly shelled. At least three monks have been killed, with several more monks and civilians who lived in the monastery sustaining injured. After heavy clashes, the

³¹ This statistic only reflects the situation for government-controlled territories of Ukraine.

territory around Sviatohirsk Lavra was liberated by the Ukrainian army in early October 2022, and the monastery started the renovation process.³²

The Irpin Bible Seminary of the Evangelical Christian-Baptists has operated in Irpin since February 1991, and in 2021 it produced its largest graduating class ever of 365. After Russia launched its invasion, the Seminary became one of the hubs where the people of Irpin were able to receive food and assistance, charge their mobile devices from a generator, or spend the night on the basement floor. On March 19, 2022, the Seminary building came under shelling, and the next day, after additional reconnaissance using a drone, it was shelled again. That day, March 20, the roof of the building was completely consumed by a fire. The internal premises, including the kitchen, were damaged, and the auxiliary structures in the yard were also affected, with the generator sustaining damage from the shells. In early April 2022, after Russian troops retreated from the Kyiv region, the staff and students of the Irpin Bible Seminary, supported by co-believers around the world, commenced the repair of the seminary building and subsequently resumed the educational process.³³

It is also noteworthy to mention a case of destruction of a structure belonging to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. The Church of Saint Andrew the First-Called, located on the grounds of the 5th Slobzhansk brigade of the National Guard of Ukraine (in the city of Kharkiv), was destroyed during the early days of the full-scale invasion, although the exact date of destruction is unknown. The facades, windows, roof and interiors suffered extensive damage. The church is an architectural monument, a feat of urban planning, and of great local significance. Established in 2013, this congregation was the first on the territory of the brigade of the National Guard of Ukraine.³⁴

Collecting data about occupied territories poses significant challenges due to limited information found in the available sources, and the dissemination of information to researchers can be dangerous for the

³² Religion on Fire, "Holy Dormition Sviatohirsk Lavra (Cave Monastery), Sviatohirsk, Donetsk oblast," [https://en.religiononfire.mar.in.ua/wiki/Holy_Dormition_Sviatohirsk_Lavra_\(Cave_Monastery\),_Sviatohirsk,_Donetsk_oblast](https://en.religiononfire.mar.in.ua/wiki/Holy_Dormition_Sviatohirsk_Lavra_(Cave_Monastery),_Sviatohirsk,_Donetsk_oblast), accessed June 10, 2023.

³³ Idem, "Irpin Bible Seminary of the Evangelical Christian-Baptists, Irpin, Kyiv oblast," https://en.religiononfire.mar.in.ua/wiki/Irpin_Bible_Seminary_of_the_Evangelical_Christian-Baptists,_Irpin,_Kyiv_oblast, accessed June 10, 2023.

³⁴ Idem, Church of St. Andrew the First-Called, Kharkiv, Kharkiv oblast," https://en.religiononfire.mar.in.ua/wiki/Church_of_St._Andrew_the_First-Called,_Kharkiv,_Kharkiv_oblast, accessed June 10, 2023.

citizens living in the occupied cities and towns. While we don't have detailed information on the case, it is known that the office building Charity Fund "Caritas" in Mariupol, Donetsk region, functioning under the auspices of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, was intentionally targeted on March 15, 2022. As a result of a direct targeted hit by a tank gun, seven people were killed, among them two employees of the fund.³⁵

The Roman Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, located in the village of Kyselivka, near Mykolaiv, was first damaged as early as March 2022. Constructed in 1852, the cathedral served various purposes during Soviet rule, including administrative use, warehousing, and later, as a location for tractor repairs, before being returned to the community in 1990. According to the parish rector Fr. Oleksandr Repin, the cathedral, situated on the front line, was destroyed by shelling on May 2, 2022. Following an initial shelling, the cathedral was hit by missiles a few days later, leading the structure to burn down completely. Only after the de-occupation of the region and the cessation of active hostilities on November 12, 2022 did the priest and the nuns manage to visit the ruins of the cathedral. Although some liturgical objects were salvaged, the ancient icons of the Mother of God were lost.³⁶

Violations of international humanitarian law against religious buildings and communities have not been limited to shelling, beatings and killings. During the one and a half years of the war, evidence has repeatedly appeared showing the Russian army militarizing religious buildings. In particular, during the partial occupation of the Kyiv region, the Russian army located its headquarters on the grounds of the church in Honor of the Pochaiv Icon of the Mother of God in the city of Bucha³⁷ and also used the Church of Ascension in the village of Bobryk as headquarter placing a sniper on the bell-tower.³⁸ In the Chernihiv region, the

³⁵ Idem, "Charity fund «Caritas Mariupol», Mariupol, Donetsk oblast," https://en.religiononfire.mar.in.ua/wiki/Charity_fund_%22Caritas_Mariupol%22,_Mariupol,_Donetsk_oblast, accessed June 10, 2023.

³⁶ Idem, "Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Kyselivka, Mykolayiv oblast," https://en.religiononfire.mar.in.ua/wiki/Cathedral_of_the_Immaculate_Conception_of_the_Blessed_Virgin_Mary,_Kyselivka,_Mykolayiv_oblast, accessed June 10, 2023.

³⁷ Idem, "Church in Honor of the Pochaiv Icon of the Mother of God, Bucha, Kyiv oblast," https://en.religiononfire.mar.in.ua/wiki/Church_in_Honor_of_the_Pochaiv_Icon_of_the_Mother_of_God,_Bucha,_Kyiv_oblast, accessed June 10, 2023.

³⁸ Idem, "Church of the Ascension, Bobryk, Kyiv oblast," https://en.religiononfire.mar.in.ua/wiki/Church_of_the_Ascension,_Bobryk,_Kyiv_oblast, accessed June 10, 2023.

Ascension church in the village of Lukashivka, which is an architectural monument, was also used as a headquarters and ammunition depot.³⁹ Earlier in 2023, information appeared about the use of the Cathedral of St. Alexander Nevsky in Melitopol (Zaporizhzhya region) for storing weapons,⁴⁰ but these data need to be verified after the de-occupation of the city.

Abuse, abduction and murder of religious leaders of Christian denominations

The full-scale invasion of Russian troops into Ukraine has already resulted in thousands of civilian and military casualties. On a nearly daily basis, international and Ukrainian human rights organizations record human rights violations as stipulated in Ukrainian legislation and international humanitarian law. The Russian military disregards the rules of warfare by employing prohibited types of weapons such as phosphorus ammunition and chemical weapons. They have also engaged in the cruel treatment of prisoners of war, the violent torture and rape of civilians (including women and children), the targeting of humanitarian corridors, and have targeted the entire civil infrastructure of Ukraine. Amid the numerous violations of international humanitarian law during the period of the full-scale invasion of Russian troops into Ukraine, we also highlight crimes against clergy, details of which are outlined below.

In the thirty-fifth *Report on the Situation with Human Rights in Ukraine*, prepared by the monitoring mission of the United Nations Organization for Human Rights in Ukraine, covering the period from August 1, 2022 to January 31, 2023,⁴¹ there is a section on the violation of fundamental freedoms, namely freedom of religion or belief. It points to three documented cases of the brutal and violent treatment of

³⁹ Idem, "Ascension Church, Lukashivka, Chernihiv Oblast," https://en.religiononfire.mar.in.ua/wiki/Ascension_Church,_Lukashivka,_Chernihiv_Oblast, accessed June 10, 2023.

⁴⁰ Bitter Winter, "Melitopol: Russians Station Soldiers and Weapons in Saint Alexander Nevsky Cathedral," <https://bitterwinter.org/melitopol-russians-soldiers-and-weapons-in-saint-alexander-nevsky-cathedral/>, accessed June 10, 2023.

⁴¹ "Dopovid shchodo sytuatsii z pravamy liudyny v Ukraini 1 serpnia 2022 roku – 31 sichnia 2023 roku" ["Report on the situation with human rights in Ukraine. Aug 1, 2022 – Jan 31, 2023"], <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/ukraine/2023/23-03-24-Ukraine-35th-periodic-report-UA.pdf>, accessed June 10, 2023.

clergymen of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and of Evangelical Christians by the Russian military, as well as describing the case of the illegal kidnapping of a Baptist pastor because of his religious beliefs in May 2022 in the Kharkiv region. The pastor was tortured and it was emphasized to him that “the Baptist Church has no place here” and that “only the Russian Orthodox Church can exist in this area”.⁴² These cases are not isolated incidents, but reflective of larger patterns of behavior towards clergy by the Russian military.

In addition to documenting damaged or destroyed religious objects since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops, the researchers of the *Religion on Fire* project monitor open sources and record cases of war crimes against clergy regardless of their religious affiliation. The database they are compiling is not public, and for now is used only by the project research team due to the fact that the collected materials contain sensitive personal information. In most cases, investigations are conducted by law enforcement agencies. These include cases of abduction, capture, intentional murder, death as a result of hostilities, or death in the performance of one’s duties in an area of active hostilities (chaplain activity). Although the information about such cases concerns clerics of different religious affiliations, the data indicates that a significant number of intentional murders and especially cruel treatment during abduction or capture is applied to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Back in July 2022, Metropolitan of Lviv and Sokal of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine Dimitriy (Rudyuk) spoke in an interview for the Catholic publication *Die Tagespost* about five Orthodox priests who were shot and one monk-priest who was tortured to death. According to the Metropolitan, during their annexation of Ukrainian territories, the Russian military actively seek out priests and ask which Church they belong to.⁴³ In general, the activities of the OCU clergy in the occupied territories are made impossible due to targeted shelling or the deliberate destruction of churches of the denomination, endangering the lives of both the clergy and the faithful.⁴⁴

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ Die Tagespost, “Russische Soldaten foltern orthodoxe Priester,” <https://www.die-tagespost.de/politik/russische-soldaten-foltern-orthodoxe-priester-art-230467>, accessed June 10, 2023.

⁴⁴ “Religion on Fire, Khram velykomuchenyka i tsilytelia Panteleimona, m. Mariupol, Donetsk oblast” [“Church of St. Martyr and Healer Panteleimon, Mariupol, Donetsk oblast”], <https://bit.ly/47bMUoQ>, accessed June 10, 2023.

On February 26, 2022, the priest of the OCU, Maxim Kozachyna, was shot by the Russian military.⁴⁵ The abbot of the parish of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the village of Rozvazhiv, Ivankiv district, Kyiv region, was stopped by the occupiers when he was returning home after a religious service. He was wearing a cassock, which allowed him to be identified as a clergyman. The military pulled him out of the car and shot him dead, leaving his body on the side of the road where it lay for several more days before local residents were able to retrieve it and bury it.⁴⁶

The OCU priests who have been abducted or held in captivity have confirmed the particularly cruel treatment they experienced once their religious affiliation was discovered. For example, on March 30, 2022, Serhii Chudynovych, the abbot of the church of the Holy Mother of God (OCU) in the city of Kherson, was kidnapped. For his pro-Ukrainian position and affiliation with the Ukrainian Church, he was brutally tortured, beaten, and threatened with rape.⁴⁷ He agreed to cooperate in order to save his life, and was released on the same day. A few days later, the priest left the parish and the occupied city, subsequently recording a video about what happened to him and posting it to his personal page on Facebook.⁴⁸

Vasyl Vyrozub, the abbot of the Odesa Holy Trinity Church of the OCU, endured over 70 days of captivity. He was part of an evacuation mission tasked with retrieving the bodies of purportedly deceased Ukrainian soldiers on Zmiynyi Island.⁴⁹ Instead of facilitating a previ-

⁴⁵ Victoria Roshchyna, “Rosiiski viiskovi vbyly sviashchennosluzhytelia PTsU na Kyivshchyni” [“Russian military killed OCU priest in Kyiv region”], <https://hromadske.ua/posts/rosijski-vijskovi-vbili-svyashchennosluzhitelya-pcu-na-kiyivshini>, accessed June 10, 2023.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ Serhiy Chudynovych, “Katuiuchy mene, rosiiany hovoryly: «Nu ty zrozumiv, shcho tvii Khrystos - fihnia?»” [“Torturing me, the Russians said: «Well, have you realized that your Christ is rubbish?»”], recorded by Lana Samokhvalova, *Ukrinform*, June 16, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3G4T27s>, accessed June 10, 2023.

⁴⁸ Idem, Video from his personal Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/4udinovi4/videos/1495587170843314>, accessed June 10, 2023.

⁴⁹ “«De khovaietsia Bandera?!»: sviashchenyk rozpoviv pro zhorstoki tortury v rosiiskomu poloni” [“«Where is Bandera hiding?!»: Priest speaks about the cruel tortures in Russian captivity”], Video, <https://www.unian.ua/society/de-hovayetsya-bandera-svyashchenik-rozpoviv-pro-zhorstoki-torturi-v-rosiyskomu-poloni-video-12175221.html>, accessed June 10, 2023.

ously agreed upon humanitarian corridor, the Russian military captured the mission crew. After the release, the priest spoke about the psychological and physical violence against the prisoners, as well as the inhumane conditions of detention characterized by a lack of food, water and sleep.

The capture of priests does not constitute isolated incidents, and do not only concern members of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Those religious leaders who decide to remain with their believers and continue to serve them, despite military occupation and annexation, are often taken prisoner as well. For example, two clergymen of the Donetsk Exarchate of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) in Berdyansk were arrested in November 2022 and later charged with keeping weapons and explosives in the church: hieromonk Ivan Levytskyi, abbot of the church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos, and father Bohdan Geleta, an employee of the same church.⁵⁰ Despite numerous appeals by the clergy of the UGCC to international institutions and foreign diplomats as well as Pope Francis' petitions for their release, nothing is known about their current whereabouts or state of health.

We also observe a hostile and aggressive attitude on the part of the occupiers towards the Protestant communities in the occupied territories. At least three cases of robbery of Baptist prayer houses in Kherson region are already confirmed.⁵¹ In an interview with the online resource Radio Liberty in November 2022, Serhiy Moroz, deputy head of the All-Ukrainian Union of Evangelical Christian Baptist Churches, addressed the issue of searches conducted in the homes of clergymen, pressure exerted on them by the occupiers, accusations of "sectarianism," and instances of pastors being captured. According to Moroz, "the most tragic case happened in Balakliya with pastor Oleksandr Salfetnikov. Due to the tortures he endured in the office of the occupiers' commander, he was placed in intensive care in the hospital and for some time was on the brink of life and death".⁵²

⁵⁰ The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, "Ofitsiina zaiava Donetskoho ekzarkhatu UHKHs z pryvodu nezakonnoho areshtu sviashchennykiv u Berdiansku" ["Official statement of the Donetsk Exarchate of the UGCC on the illegal arrest of priests in Berdiansk"], <https://bit.ly/3uxWggY>, accessed June 10, 2023.

⁵¹ "Yak peresliduiut baptystiv na okupovanykh terytoriiakh?" ["How are Baptists persecuted in the occupied territories?"], <https://sobor.com.ua/news/peresliduyut-baptystiv>, accessed June 10, 2023.

⁵² Valeria Konstantinova, "Zaboroniaiut molytysia za Ukrainu». Yak peresliduiut virian baptystskoi tserkvy v okupatsii?" ["Forbidden to pray for Ukraine». How are

The village of Motyzhyn near Kyiv was also under the Russian army control for a month, and after de-occupation facts of torture and the murder of local residents came to light. In particular, one of the ministers of the “Vosor” rehabilitation centre, which had been operating in the village since 2006 under the auspices of the “Salvation” Church (Christians of Evangelical Faith), was captured. On March 24, 2022, a few days before the occupiers vacated the area, a Russian unit stormed and shelled the rehabilitation center, also firing small arms inside the building. Patients who did not manage to escape were taken out into the street under the threat of execution, and the minister of the centre was kidnapped, beaten and tortured.⁵³ He was freed only after the retreat of the Russian military, and the institution later resumed its operations.

At the end of 2022, the annual report of the manager of the affairs of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (MP) was published, a section of which was devoted to the activities of the Church in the context of war. It states that during almost a year of hostilities in Ukraine, “seven priests of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church were killed, and another 12 clerics were wounded. Two more of our priests are considered missing”.⁵⁴ Documented cases exist for the abduction of priests of this denomination despite their affinity with the Russian Orthodox Church. For example, at the end of May 2023, priest Ihor Novosilsky, rector of the church of Saint Princess Olga in the village of Tokarivka, Kherson region, was released after 9 months of captivity.⁵⁵

It remains difficult to identify an exact number of murdered, killed or captured religious leaders because significant territories of Ukraine remain occupied and the fate of many clergymen is unknown. The process of documenting such cases is complicated by the enormous difficulty of verifying the information from open sources, including social networks. We also believe that part of the data is not made public for security

Baptist Church believers persecuted in the occupation”], Radio Svoboda, <https://bit.ly/47GAead>, accessed June 10, 2023.

⁵³ Slidstvo Info, “Where they killed, there they pigged out”: the victims recognized their executioners in Motyzhyn,” <https://bit.ly/3up3a8o>, accessed June 10, 2023.

⁵⁴ “Zvit Keruiuchoho spravamy Ukrainskoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvy za 2022 rik” [“Report of the Chancellor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church for 2022”], <https://bit.ly/47jtjnz>, accessed June 10, 2023.

⁵⁵ “Z rosiiskoho polonu zvilнено kliryka Khersonskoi yeparkhii sviashchennyka Ihoria Novosilskoho” [“Priest Ihor Novosilsky, a cleric of the Kherson diocese, is released from Russian captivity”], <https://bit.ly/3uqfRzX>, accessed June 10, 2023.

reasons, in order to protect the lives and health of religious leaders who are still in the occupied territories or have been captured.

Changes in the activities of Christian religious communities

In addition to the heavy losses, particularly the destruction of the religious infrastructure and the death of members of the priesthood, Christian communities have undergone profound changes in their activities and ministry. This not only shows their adaptability the new context but such changes might also affect their future role in Ukraine more broadly.

Significant change to the religious landscape in Ukrainian territory have been brought about by the mass migration of people away from occupied or conflict-ridden territories. According to official data, 4,965,000 Ukrainians are internally displaced,⁵⁶ and even more – 6,242,200 – are refugees all over the world.⁵⁷ Taking into account several sociological surveys which record a fairly high level of religiosity among the Ukrainian population and find that a majority of Ukrainians identify as Christians or with Christian denominations, it is evident that some religious communities in Ukraine have either disappeared altogether or have suffered significant numerical losses owing to parishioners being displaced or killed. For example, in an interview regarding the situation of the religious community in the village of Antonivka (Kherson oblast), the archpriest of the UOC-MP, Georgii Guliaiev, said that he cannot predict whether or not believers will return to liberated areas and restore their communities, because “serious are the material destruction and changes, but even greater is the spiritual destruction”.⁵⁸

A more conscientious approach to religious affiliation and a principled rejection of the Russian Orthodox Church has also led a large number of Orthodox religious communities to pass from the UOC to the OCU. During the last five years about 1,500 religious communities have changed their affiliation, with 1,000 of these transitions taking place

⁵⁶ “Za rik kilkist VPO zbilshylasia na 300 tys. osib – Vereshchuk” [“Over the Year, the Number of IDPs Increased by 300,000 People – Vereshchuk”], <https://fakty.com.ua/ua/ukraine/suspilstvo/20230901-za-rik-kilkist-vpo-zbilshylasya-na-300-tys-osib-vereshchuk/>, accessed November 1, 2023.

⁵⁷ “Ukraine Refugee Situation,” <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>, accessed November 1, 2023.

⁵⁸ “Some Ruined Churches Will Remain History...” – Archpriest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Georgii Guliaiev,” <https://bit.ly/3GbgslI>, accessed November 1, 2023.

since the beginning of the full-scale invasion.⁵⁹ Legal complications and the very process of the jurisdictional transition of the entire community has at times aggravated social tensions and conflicts within communities as well as conflicts between the community, clergy and local authorities.

Many Christian religious communities have intensified their humanitarian, social, and psychological assistance programs, offering refuge and services to those in need. Churches have become sanctuaries for the destitute, a place of temporary stay for displaced persons, and centers for the distribution of food, basic necessities, medicines, and more. These communities have played a pivotal role in organizing the evacuation of people from hazardous areas and occupied territories. This pastoral service by churches underscores the involvement of religious communities in social processes and reflects their willingness to serve people in need regardless of their religious affiliation.

Nazarii Prodaniuk, pastor of the Second Adventist Community of Kherson and chaplain of the *DieSlovo* school, spoke in an interview with the *Religion on Fire* project about his community's decision to engage in humanitarian aid: they collected funds, bought groceries, and distributed them to those in need. They also launched a program for social and psychological rehabilitation for traumatized children and teenagers from the Kherson region.⁶⁰ Mykhailo Kozakov, a member of the Evangelical Reformed Presbyterian Church in Odesa, as well as a pastor's assistant and preacher, similarly emphasized the multiple humanitarian activities his Church has engaged in since the beginning of 2022 in his interview with our project.⁶¹

The conscious shift made by many Ukrainians from Russian to Ukrainian as a primary spoken language has also influenced the change of the language of worship and sermons. For example, according to one

⁵⁹ "Protses tryvaie: maizhe tysiacha hromad za pivtora roky povnomasshtabnoi viiny vyishla z UPTs MP i pryednalasia do PTsU (onovleno)" ["The Process Continues: During the One and a Half Years of Full-Scale War, Almost a Thousand Communities Left the UOC MP and Joined the OCU (Updated)"], <https://bit.ly/Processcontinues>, accessed November 1, 2023.

⁶⁰ "«After the Victory, There Will Be a Lot of Traumatized People Who Will Need Our Support» – Nazarii Prodaniuk, Pastor of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church," <https://bit.ly/3SOUmmw>, accessed November 1, 2023.

⁶¹ "«Church Won't Vanish, But Every Community Must Think About the Future» – Mykhailo Kozakov, Pastor's Assistant in Evangelical Reformed Presbyterian Church in Odesa," <https://bit.ly/49J9Pua>, accessed November 1, 2023.

of the official representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Kyiv, the Church rather organically changed its language of worship.⁶² A related issue is that of the calendar reform, which was successfully accepted and launched among the OCU and UGCC communities.

In some Christian churches, religious education has undergone major changes and endured losses. Some educational institutions located in occupied or war-torn territories have been damaged or destroyed, and others have interrupted their educational work in order to not endanger their students. For example, the Ukrainian Evangelical Seminary (Evangelical Christian Baptists) in the village of Berezhivka (Kyiv region) suspended its operations for more than a year. The pause was a result of the village being under occupation for a month and a half, as the processes of reckoning with impact of the occupation and the restoration of seminary buildings required time and resources.⁶³

Conclusions

The impact of a war that is still ongoing cannot be measured by narratives. While an average of at least one religious building is damaged per day, while the deaths of religious leaders continue, and while others are captured and persecuted in the occupied territories, not all Ukrainian and world church structures have been able to quickly formulate and express a position regarding the war. Even from those who have taken a position, Ukrainian co-believers often expected clearer wording, given the clarity of the messaging from the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church in support of the war. Churches are just beginning to understand and verbalize the impact that the full-scale Russian invasion has had and continues to have on the Christian communities of Ukraine. But academic researchers can already formulate several conclusions.

The war is changing the religious landscape of Ukraine. Each shelling of a religious building or killing of a religious leader makes the life of the community increasingly difficult, and numerous religious communities from the regions most affected by the war have ceased to exist or have been forced to relocate. The religious landscape is changing even more dramatically in the occupied territories, where representatives

⁶² The interview with Kateryna Serdyuk is being prepared for the publication on WASR website.

⁶³ The interview with Andriy Shved is being prepared for the publication on WASR website.

of several denominations and specific religious organizations are openly persecuted, and places of worship expropriated. Despite the fact that the largest number of religious buildings damaged during hostilities belong to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, they make up only a small percentage of the total number of UOC-MP religious buildings functioning in Ukraine. On the other hand, in the case of religious and denominational minorities, a smaller number of damaged religious buildings wreaks significantly more destruction on the community at hand, threatening to erase it completely from the territory of Ukraine.

The war is causing a reduction of trust in some Ukrainian Churches, in particular in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Over the course of 2022, more communities announced their intention to transition from the UOC to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine than in the previous three years combined (although in some cases the transition process has not yet been completed). The reason for the transition is often the indecisive position of the UOC leadership regarding the war, as well as the desire to break with the Russian Orthodox Church. In particular, the *Religion on Fire* project has repeatedly recorded cases in which a community transferred completely or partially from the UOC to the OCU after experiencing occupation and repression at the hands of Russian troops. The support of Russian aggression by the Russian Orthodox Church reduces the trust of Ukrainian society in all Christian Churches that have not clearly condemned the Russian Orthodox Church; this applies not only to the UOC, but also to a number of international Churches and ecumenical platforms.

As long as direct hostilities, the shelling of religious buildings and crimes against religious leaders continue, it is important to meticulously document such cases and other violations of international humanitarian law against religious communities. Thorough documentation will serve as a critical foundation for future scholarly work, shedding light on the objective history of the war and enhancing our understanding of its impact on the Christian communities of Ukraine. Furthermore, this documentation will play a crucial role in seeking justice for the victims and holding war criminals accountable for their actions.