## The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Russian Invasion: A Fact Sheet

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) is the largest of the 23 Eastern Catholic Churches in communion with the Pope of Rome. In the US, it has four eparchies (diocese), 210 parishes, and is called the "Ukrainian Catholic Church."

According to the *Annuario Pontificio*, in 2020 the UGCC numbered 5 million faithful in Ukraine (according to a 2015 survey, 8.1% of the total population of Ukraine, *excluding* Crimea is Greek Catholic). Another half million members reside internationally. Today there are 36 eparchies (dioceses) or exarchates in the UGCC—16 in Ukraine and 20 outside, with a total of 52 bishops. There are 780 seminarians in different UGCC seminaries throughout the world.

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Byzantine Christianity was established in Kyivan Rus' in 988 by Grand Prince St. Volodymyr. At that time, Rome and Constantinople were in communion, not separated. After the Schism of 1054, the Kyivan Church remained in the jurisdiction of Constantinople. Some intermittent communication with the Church of Rome over the centuries did occur.

In 1596 a re-union of the Kyivan Church with Rome was declared in the city of Brest (today in Belarus). It is known as the Union of Brest. This union was not accepted by 2 bishops, many nobles, clergy, monasteries and faithful, leading to a bifurcation of the Kyivan Church into Orthodox and Eastern Catholic metropolitanates. In 1686, through a canonically dubious process, the Orthodox metropolitanate was de facto transferred from the jurisdiction of Patriarchate of Constantinople to the Patriarchate of Moscow. In 2018 the Patriarch of Constantinople reaffirmed the uncanonical nature of that de facto transfer and granted a *tomos* of autocephaly recognizing the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. A large part of Ukrainian Orthodoxy remains under the Patriarchate of Moscow and calls itself the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

The third partition of Poland in 1795 brought most Ukrainian lands under Russian Tsarist control. By 1839 the Tsarist authorities had largely suppressed the Eastern Catholic Church within the Russian imperial realm. A final eradication occurred in 1875. Eastern Catholics within the Russian Empire were fully incorporated into the Russian Orthodox Church. **This begins a lasting pattern: every time a Russian regime—tsarist or communist—occupies Ukrainian territory, the UGCC is persecuted and eventually rendered illegal and criminalized. The fate of the Eastern Catholics in Crimea and Russian-occupied Crimea or Donbas reflects this pattern. It is safe to expect that a lasting occupation of Ukraine by Russia would lead to a suppression of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, a further persecution of the Muslim Tatars (as evidenced since 2014 in Crimea), repressions against Protestant communities (4 leaders were executed in 2014 in the Donbas), and the Ukrainian Jewish community, which includes President Volodymyr Zelensky (the Babyn Yar Holocaust memorial was hit by rocket fire on March 1, 2022) .**

In 1772, much of present-day western Ukraine came under Habsburg (Catholic) rule. In 1807 the Eastern Catholic Church, by the Habsburgs called "Greek Catholic," was organized into a Metropolitanate with its center in Lviv. In the nineteenth and in the first decades of the twentieth century the Church advanced the modernization, education, cultural development, and social and political emancipation of its members. The clergy led these movements and constituted much of the leadership of western Ukrainian society. The Church defended its members who were economically poor, socially underprivileged, and politically disenfranchised.

The twentieth century brought untold hardships for the people and religions of Ukraine. Some 15 million were killed between 1914 and 1950. Because of Soviet communist and Nazi totalitarian genocidal policies, between 1933 and 1945, Ukraine was the most dangerous place on the globe. In 1932-33, Stalin orchestrated the Holodomor or artificial terror-famine that killed ca. 4 million inhabitants of some of the most fertile lands in the world (Breadbasket of Europe). At least 1.5 million Jews were killed in the Holocaust in Ukraine, home to the largest Jewish community in Europe. An estimated 6.8 million Ukrainians were killed during World War II. Over 2 million Ukrainians were deported to Germany by the Nazis as slave laborers.
Stalin deported all 423,000 Muslim Tatars to Central Asia and 750,000 Roman Catholic Poles, Jews, and Armenian Catholics in acts of ethnic cleansing.

Stalin and Hitler collaborated to begin World War II by signing the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. For the first two years of the war communist Moscow and Nazi Berlin were allies at war.

In 1939, the Soviets occupied western Ukraine installing a brutal regime of repression. All Greek Catholic publications, charities, and educational and social institutions were closed. Many Ukrainian political and social activists, priests, and church members were imprisoned, deported to Siberia, and/or executed. In 1941, all of Ukraine was occupied by Nazi Germany. Clergy and members of the UGCC who resisted Nazi rule were arrested. Many were executed. The Nazi occupation devastated Ukraine. During the Nazi Holocaust, the UGCC's Primate, Archbishop Andrei Sheptytsky, sheltered more than 150 Jewish children and youth. He wrote a letter to SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler, a main author of the Holocaust, condemning the murderous policies of the Nazis. His pastoral letter "Thou Shalt not Kill" was read in every parish church.

In 1944, the Soviets reoccupied western Ukraine. Beginning in April 1945, all Ukrainian Greek-Catholic bishops were arrested by the NKVD (KGB) and were killed or sent to the Gulag. In 1946, a pseudo-synod orchestrated by the NKVD nullified the Union of Brest. The UGCC was declared illegal and driven underground, becoming the largest illegal Church in the world (1946-1989). Thousands of clergy and faithful who refused to join the Moscow Patriarchate were sent to Siberia, tortured, and killed. In 2001, during a pastoral pilgrimage to Ukraine Pope St. John Paul II beatified 27 new martyrs and confessors of the UGCC.

On December 1, 1989, during the general liberalization of Soviet life, the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church was legalized. Not having collaborated with the Soviet regime, it emerged from the catacombs with unique moral authority.

After legalization and during the three decades of Ukraine's independence, the UGCC in Ukraine increased from 3 eparchies (diocese) to 16. The number of priests grew ten-fold, from ca. 300 to 3,000. The UGCC articulated and incarnated Catholic social doctrine, becoming a respected institution contributing substantially to the development of Ukrainian democracy, civil society, and social, educational, and political reform.

The current head of the UGCC is His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk (b. 1970), Major Archbishop of Kyiv-Halych. The leadership of the UGCC was characterized by great spiritual stature and social vision. Its twentieth century continuity in the persons of Andrey Sheptytsky (1900-44), Josyf Slipyj (1944-84), Myroslav Ivan Lubachivsky (1984-2000) is an important factor in the UGCC's historical survival and contemporary flourishing. Cardinal Lubomyr Husar (2001-2011) was considered a guiding moral authority in independent Ukraine.