



UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH
SVIATOSLAV SHEVCHUK
MAJOR ARCHBISHOP OF KYIV-HALYCH

Вих. BA 25/191 ENG

Page 1 of 4

“PERSEVERING IN HOPE, STRONG IN LOVE” (cf. Rom. 12: 12):
THE UKRAINIAN FAMILY IN TIME OF WAR

Pastoral Letter of the 2025 Synod of Bishops
of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church
To the Clergy, Religious and Lay Faithful of the UGCC
To Families in Ukraine and Abroad
To all People of Good Will

*Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts,
kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,
bearing with one another... and forgiving each other...
And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*
(Col. 3:12-14)

Beloved in Christ!

Having gathered as pilgrims of hope at this year's Synod of Bishops of the UGCC in Rome, we devoted special attention to the theme “Pastoral Care of Families in Conditions of War.” It is no coincidence that the issue of the family was considered in the context of the Year of Hope, as the Christian family is called to be a privileged place of growth in faith, holiness and love, that is, a “domestic Church” where in an atmosphere of faith, prayer, and family warmth, a father and mother with their children nurture Christian hope—for a happy and God-pleasing life here on earth, and for receiving the promise of future blessings. “For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe” (I Tim. 4:10).

It is not easy to speak of hope in the current conditions of war. Every family faces serious challenges today—both in Ukraine and abroad. We live in a world that not only fails to protect and duly appreciate the special calling of the family but also creates numerous obstacles to its full development. Meanwhile, the missiles of the insidious enemy are deliberately aimed at the Ukrainian family—attacking cities and villages, ruining civilian infrastructure, destroying hospitals, schools, kindergartens, and residential buildings. Among the challenges that you certainly have noticed or perhaps experienced in your own life: separation, alienation, loss of a loved one, financial instability, a constant sense of

danger, physical health problems, as well as various kinds of psychological trauma caused by the war. All these pains and sufferings of the Ukrainian people, and above all, of our families, we raise up in daily prayer to the throne of the Almighty in firm hope for His certain help, salvation, protection, and salvation.

All of us – bishops, priests, consecrated persons, and laity – care deeply about the state of families whose members are fighting in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the families of veterans, of those killed, wounded, or missing-in-action, as well as those who remain in the occupied territories or in areas of intense fighting. Each of us opens our heart to those who were forced to leave their homes – displaced persons both within the territory of Ukraine and beyond its borders. We seek to extend a helping hand in some way to families in need. Many of us have gratefully accepted such support from others.

Over the past three years of war, we have gained significant practical pastoral experience in ministering to families. This experience also includes fruitful collaboration with mental health professionals who are active members of our Church, work in the sphere of human formation in our educational institutions and understand the need for both spiritual accompaniment and professional therapy. Our monasteries have become oases of spiritual healing for many, supporting and strengthening familial and interpersonal relationships. We especially appreciate the dedicated ministry of our pastors who, often experiencing their own traumas and family difficulties, do not abandon their daily work to faithfully support their flock as “wounded healers,” able to sympathize in Christ Jesus with the pains of others, because they themselves experience them in their own lives (cf. Heb. 4:15; 5:2).

We strive for parishes to be places of healing, of spiritual and humanitarian support for families – through participation in common prayer and the Holy Mysteries (sacraments) of the Church, as well as through initiatives such as peer-support groups, where people with similar experiences can share with each other and feel human compassion and understanding. Such assistance is directed, first of all, towards those who have lost loved ones and whose pain no one is able to understand unless they themselves have experienced a similar loss.

We encourage each parish community to become an environment that forms young people and betrothed couples for family life and supports Christian families in their vocation to create a “domestic Church.” We strive to continue journeying in pilgrimage together with our families, in unity and solidarity, with a shared sense of hope and mission.

Our righteous Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky in his pastoral letter, “On the Christian Family” (1900), emphasized that the Christian understanding of family is a teaching “on which the future of all humanity depends and on which it is based.” Confessor of faith, Patriarch Joseph, in his “Testament” wrote: “Parents! The Christian family is the foundation of a healthy society, a people, and a nation. It is the key to their growth and strength! And, therefore, I entreat you: preserve, and where it has been shaken, restore in the Ukrainian people the true Christian family, as an unquenchable hearth of life and health of the Church and the People!”

We recall these words of our luminaries of the Christian faith, in order to once again draw attention to the fundamental truth that you yourselves understand and sense: the Christian family is the first school of faith, of prayer, and of service to one's neighbour, it is the first community where children discover "the hope to which the Lord calls us," it is the first "place of encounter with the living Christ." Parents are the first icons of God's love and goodness for their children. What an immense and worthy calling this is, what a sacred responsibility: that our Lord God chooses parents to reveal Himself to His children! And His Holiness Pope Leo XIV calls upon parents to fulfil this responsibility: "I encourage you, then, to be examples of integrity to your children, acting as you want them to act, educating them in freedom through obedience, always seeing the good in them and finding ways to nurture it. And you, dear children, show gratitude to your parents. To say 'thank you' each day for the gift of life and for all that comes with it is the first way to honour your father and your mother (cf. Ex 20:12). Finally, dear grandparents and elderly people, I recommend that you watch over your loved ones with wisdom and compassion, and with the humility and patience that come with age."

Dear parents, allow us to thank you in a special way for all your efforts, and to say: "Do not be afraid!" We thank you for your love for your children, for your sleepless nights, for your great sacrifice, for your patience, for your living testimony of faith and hope, for your common prayer in the family, for your participation in the life of the Church together with your children. Therefore, do not be afraid to give birth to and raise God's children, which is a living testimony of the hope you place in the Lord of heaven and earth, and seeds for the growth and constant renewal of His Church and our people. Having received the gift of natural life through your parents and the gift of supernatural life into which you were born from water and the Spirit in the Holy Mysteries of the Church of Christ, do not be afraid to pass these gifts on to the next generation.

The world today is in great need of what Pope Francis called the "Gospel of the Family" –communities where challenges are met in an atmosphere of joy and mutual support in love, where the Gospel of love is preached to the world not with words but with deeds of love and mercy, where the human soul rises in prayer to its Lord with uplifted hands and an open heart. Do not be afraid, for everything you need for this sacred task has already been placed within you—by the action of the Holy Spirit and the blessing you received on the day of your wedding. Then your mother-Church gave you the gift of this Spirit of love, summoning Him to descend upon you with the words: "So too come here and bless this marriage with Your unseen presence, and give these servants of Yours a peaceful life, length of days, chastity, love for one another in a bond of peace, long-lived descendants, delight in their children and an unfading crown of glory. Let them see their children's children, keep their bed unassailed, give to them of the dew of the heavens above and of the fertility of the earth. Fill their homes with wheat, wine and oil, and with every good thing, so that they may share with those in need" (Order of Crowning). What the Lord said to His apostles before His ascension also applies to every Christian family: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Dear Fathers—pastors, you are our closest collaborators in Christ's vineyard, and you often carry out your ministry with the support of your wives and children. May the parishes in which you serve be a true family home, a community of communities, a place where every family unit can find support, where every person – from the child to the elder – will be enveloped in God's love and human care. May God's love be revealed in your every word and blessed deed and may your parish become a space where every family can draw living water from the well of God's grace and Gospel teaching to fulfil all to which it is called from the Lord. Promote family movements in our Church, providing them with appropriate spiritual accompaniment and instructing them to walk "the path of the Church." Be blessed with the grace of your laying-on of hands and, if you are married, with the grace of the Holy Mystery of Matrimony that you have received. Thank you for your dedication, your spirit of selfless sacrifice and zealous service.

Beloved in Christ! Among the most precious gifts that the Lord gives us is time — a non-renewable resource that comes in an instant and is gone forever. It cannot be returned or replaced. And yet, how often family members lack time for each other! Wishing to further develop family ministry in our Church, we call upon our fathers-pastors to pay greater attention to this important aspect of service. We remind our faithful of the need for common prayer, which restores, purifies and strengthens relationships with God and of family members among themselves. It is also important to appreciate time spent in tender communication between husband and wife, in the caring love of parents for their children, in attentiveness to the elderly and to those who have special needs in our families—in particular the wounded, the suffering, and those traumatized by war.

Let us use this priceless gift of time to be close to God and to each other, creating a community of pilgrims of hope: parents—among themselves and with their children, families—with families, clergy and laity—in parish communities, parishes—in eparchial unity, consecrated communities—in service to the Church, and all of us together—as one spiritual family, the Church of Christ. In this community of God's children may each family sense our understanding, our support, our gratitude and closeness: your Church is always with you!

May the blessing of Almighty God, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, descend upon our people, upon each of our families, and abide with us all forever!!

On behalf of the Synod of Bishops of the
Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church



† SVIATOSLAV

Given in Kyiv,
at the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ,
on the day of Holy Venerable-Martyr Dometius,
on the 7th day of August in the 2025th year of our Lord