UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH
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Pastoral Letter of His Beatitude Sviatoslav To the Clergy of the UGCC On Holy Thursday, in the Year of our Lord 2021

Dearly Beloved Brothers in the Priesthood of Christ!

This year, as we experience the profound mystery of Holy Thursday, we hear the special invitation of our Lord Jesus Christ to once again sit down with Him at the mystical banquet of the Last Supper. Our spiritual eyes are directed towards the only and eternal Celebrant of the Divine Liturgy—our Saviour and Teacher, who leans down towards contemporary humanity, wounded by the current pandemic, and scourged by new types of loneliness, poverty, suffering, and despair. This Servant-Minister rises from His place of honour at table, disrobes and, taking a washbasin, gets down on His knees before present-day humanity in order to wash its feet.

In order to fulfill this ministry today and make it accessible for all people, He calls on us, His priests, to reimagine in a new way the content and tasks of our priestly ministry. It is in us and through us that He wishes to get on His knees in order to lean down towards the world. It is with our hands that He longs to wash the wounds of contemporary societies. It is us whom He made partakers of His Divine Priesthood and to us He handed over His Holy Mysteries as medicine, capable of healing these wounds by the power and action of the Holy Spirit. Gazing at this ineffable divine ministry in contemporary circumstances and events, on the occasion of the day in which the Holy Mystery of the New Testament Priesthood was established, we ask ourselves: what does it mean today to be a priest of Christ "after the order of Melchisedek" and how should we act, in order to be faithful to our vocation and to the will of our Lord?

In pandemic conditions the Lord speaks to His disciples and to the world, compels us to reflect on how we should "be Church" in this time of "social distancing and isolation," on the lasting impact this time will have on the life of Christians. The Saviour calls us to learn to differentiate between that which is substantive and a priority for the Church at this time—without which we cannot be authentic disciples of Christ—and that which is less important and can be disregarded; what decisions need to be made in this testing time in order to reorient the spiritual life of the people.

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In the course of the past year, we have learned, as never before, to use contemporary social media communication technologies in a new way. Indeed, in many cases, online broadcast of liturgical services were the only means available to our faithful to satisfy their spiritual needs. However, Pope Francis, understanding well that the path to a full restoration of the normal rhythm of life will take time, insistently encourages all the faithful to accept this time as a temporary phenomenon, in the midst of extraordinary and forced circumstances, for the ideal of the Church was and will always remain—to gather together the people, be with them and bring them together in the Holy Mysteries. "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Mt. 18:20) - says the Lord. For this reason the Holy Father cautions against an abstract connection between God and the community, saying: "This closeness to Christ without community, without the Eucharist, without the people of God assembled together and without the sacraments is dangerous." We can pray together with the assistance of live broadcasts, we can listen to the Word of God and preach the Gospel of Christ, but in this manner we cannot administer the Holy Mysteries, without which the fullness of Christian life simply does not exist.

When the contemporary world speaks ever increasingly of economic and social crises and even about the danger of a famine of biblical proportions for contemporary humanity as a result of the pandemic, our faithful begin to call out to the conscience of their pastors, attesting to their eucharistic famine. Speaking to His Apostles, Jesus said: "They need not go away; you give them something to eat" (Mt. 14:16), telling them to give of what they had in the desert, thus making them capable of feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fishes. Today, He says the same to His priests, having in mind not only the need for earthly bread, but also hunger and thirst for the Heavenly Bread. Our people love work enough to be able to provide daily bread for themselves, but only a priest of Christ can feed them with Heavenly Bread. Let us heed this cry that expresses the Eucharistic hunger and spiritual thirst of our people!

Even though the circumstances in which humanity has found itself because of the pandemic continue to influence our church life, yet even when strict quarantine measures are introduced, such external factors cannot paralyze us in our ministry and church life, cannot prevent us, as Church, from continuing to care for human souls. However, it is necessary to reflect on the style and new forms of pastoral ministry during and, especially, after the coronavirus pandemic. I am certain that this crisis is an occasion for pastoral conversion, as Pope Francis says in his Apostolic Exhortation "Gaudium evangelii" (par. 27). Today, at the level of the Universal Church it is said that possibly the most effective method of fulfilling spiritual care is through accompaniment. This method can help keep the clergy from returning to the pre-pandemic "old normal," and make radical changes for the better, beginning with the building of healthy interpersonal relationships. This includes the need to rethink and modify the form of our pastoral ministry, seeking to be next to a person , guiding him or her on the path of life. In order to be present in the life of our parishioners, in order to know them and be able to listen to them, we must find a way to them through relationships. To be close to a human being, connect with him or her and

guide them in the living circumstances of today—this is something more than merely being concerned about the good of our parishioners.

During the pandemic we thank God for many good priests, who not just passively stand by their parishioners, but through preaching the Word of God, celebrating the Divine Mysteries, and performing works of mercy make our Lord God visible and present to each person, especially in the dramatic moments of their lives. They personally accompany their faithful, give of themselves fully in their service, take unto themselves their difficulties and pain, show them compassion in their suffering, and find happiness in their joys. The pledge to successful conversion, of which the Holy Father speaks, is to change the manner in which we stand with our people, the manner in which we are priests, relate to civil authority, society as a whole, the youth and our parishioners., This is a difficult but important task!

And so, in the circumstances of today, a priest is called to build a new Christian culture of relationship. Loneliness without community may lead to escape, to isolation, and even to deep depression. Most probably, we have realized more than once that life in community, where people live in fraternal love, makes a greater impact than impressive and splendid edifices. This is why we are called to not only create and adorn the church built by human hands, but above all to foster the beauty and grandeur of the temple that is not built by human hands—a human being, and to build the Church as a living community, as the mystical Body of Christ.

In times of quarantine, we rediscovered for ourselves the importance of interpersonal relations and the value of human solidarity, and also—that not one of us is saved alone, as Pope Francis frequently reminds us. We've understood that the ability to relate in person, to listen and speak, is more precious than all our modern technologies, which, even though they support our lives, helping us take part in the Eucharistic service through social media, but can never be able to guarantee for us a real encounter, one person with another, and with the living God in common prayer. We can meet online, but to teach and love only online—that's difficult, if not effectively impossible. Therefore, there is always a need for healthy, complete, and authentic human relations.

This important building up of a new type of interpersonal relations, founded on the Gospel leaven of merciful and compassionate love, must begin from our immediate surroundings—our community, with our bishop and among ourselves. I assume that all of you are already convinced of the importance of vibrant contacts and a sincere relationship within the priestly community.

On the day of our ordination, we became members of the presbyteral order. And so, especially today, it is important to realize that this order is not something akin to an elite club with special clergy privileges. This is a living brotherly community of the Christ's closest disciples and sharers in His priesthood. Sustained by the Holy Spirit, today it should become for our clergy a place for mutual listening and support, solidarity and assistance, a sharing of hurts and joys, failures and successes—a place of maturing in the priesthood of Christ. "Look, how they love one another"—is what pagan society would say with admiration, observing the life of early Christians. May these same words express the

admiration of today's world, in response to seeing the authentic Christian solidarity of our communities. One of the effective ways of fostering such priestly communion is the presence of priestly fraternities, which I continue to encourage you to establish and join.

Dear Fathers, Hieromonks, Deacons and Brother-seminarians! This day, when we celebrate the Institution of the Holy Mystery of the Priesthood, I long to greet all of you as we remember this great gift that God has bestowed on us. I thank you from my heart that at a certain time you responded to this calling from the Lord and, having received the Holy Mystery of the Priesthood, you do not neglect this gift, but live it, grow in it, and bear fruit. This day the entire Church together with her Head—Jesus Christ, prays for you! May the grace of the Holy Spirit strengthen you in this ministry, endow you with creativity and sensitivity in the search for new forms and methods in its realization, so that we might help the person of today increasingly experience within our church communities a healing and saving encounter with the living Christ.

Entering this Paschal time, I wish you the heavenly joy that comes from fulfilling the task, that we are able to offer the Risen Lord according to His word: ""We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty" (Lk. 17:10).

The blessing of the Lord be upon you!

Верховний Архиєпископ Української Греко-Католицької Церкви
СВЯТОСЛАВ ШЕВЧУК

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