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## EXPERIENCE OF CHAPLAINCY SERVICE IN THE ARMED FORCES OF LEADING COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD

*The article examines the peculiarities of organizing military chaplaincy activities in the armed forces of leading countries worldwide. It identifies the key principles for meeting the spiritual and religious needs of service members, which form the foundation for the establishment and functioning of the chaplaincy institution in the Armed Forces of Ukraine.*

**Keywords:** chaplain, military chaplaincy activity, moral support, psychological support, spiritual readiness, spiritual leader, contemporary experience.

**Statement of the problem.** The realities of the russian-ukrainian war once again demonstrate that the effectiveness of the armed forces depends not only on combat equipment and tactics but also on the moral, psychological, and spiritual condition of the personnel. Therefore, fundamental questions arise: how is military chaplaincy organized in the armed forces of leading countries, and what practices can be effectively implemented in the further development of chaplaincy service within the Armed Forces of Ukraine? It appears appropriate to analyze and systematize the international experience of chaplaincy in order to identify effective principles and approaches that can be adapted and applied in the national context.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** A review of recent academic publications confirms the decisive importance of chaplaincy experience in the armed forces of leading countries (primarily NATO members) for the development of military chaplaincy in Ukraine. This experience serves as a benchmark for the institutionalization and professionalization of military chaplaincy under the conditions of a full-scale war.

Unlike most NATO countries, which developed their chaplaincy systems during peacetime, Ukraine is shaping this institution in the midst of full-scale war. Although Ukrainian chaplaincy possesses unique experience gained in wartime on its own territory, it must orient itself toward the advanced NATO models.

The experience of allied participation in counterterrorism operations and hybrid wars

(Afghanistan, Iraq) is particularly valuable. International models define the military chaplain as a specialist whose mission complements military psychology and focuses on moral, ethical, and existential issues [4].

In the context of the war in Ukraine, researchers emphasize that military chaplains, as "guardians of the human soul" help prevent the erosion of moral values and ethical norms, thereby sustaining not only individual resilience but also collective motivation and morale [1, 8].

The international academic community views military chaplaincy as an indispensable component of a holistic approach to the health of service members. Chaplains complement the work of medical personnel and military psychologists by addressing spiritual, moral, and psychological needs – essential for long-term stress resilience and high motivation among troops [12].

The analyzed international experience, combined with the results of chaplaincy activities during the russian-ukrainian war, should form the foundation for the further development of chaplaincy service in the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

**The purpose of the article** is to identify and analyze the main principles and approaches of chaplaincy service in the armed forces of leading countries that can be adapted to the Ukrainian context and implemented in the continued institutional development of the Chaplaincy Service of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

**Summary of the main material.** The institution of military chaplaincy occupies a special

place in the structure of modern armed forces, as its mission extends beyond purely religious service. Chaplains perform the functions of spiritual mentors, psychologists, social workers, and advisers to military commanders. In the 20th and 21st centuries, as wars have become more technologically advanced yet psychologically exhausting, the role of chaplains in maintaining morale and psychological stability among service members has become critically important.

Recent studies emphasize that a chaplain is one of the key factors in ensuring so-called spiritual readiness – the ability of a service member to overcome existential and moral crises in combat conditions [6].

The history of military chaplaincy dates back to the Middle Ages. In medieval Europe, clergy accompanied knights on campaigns, performed religious rites, and provided care to the wounded and sick. During the 17th–18th centuries, as standing armies were formed, chaplaincy began to take on institutional forms. In Great Britain, the Royal Army Chaplains' Department was established at the end of the 18th century and remains active today. Similar structures emerged in France, Austria, and Prussia, gradually integrating into the military system.

During the First and Second World Wars, the role of military chaplains grew significantly. They were present on the front lines, conducted field worship services, sustained the morale of soldiers, and cared for the wounded. Their presence in hospitals and during burials had a profound psychological effect. Often, chaplains were the only people soldiers could confide in during moments of despair. In the postwar period, military chaplaincy became integrated into the system of military education, playing an important role in fostering patriotism, moral values, and interpersonal trust within military units.

Particular attention should be paid to the American model of chaplaincy. In the U.S. Armed Forces, chaplain corps exist across all branches of service, and chaplains have officer rank, though they do not carry weapons. They play an exceptional role as moral and spiritual leaders. A unique feature of the American model is its multi-faith character: representatives of dozens of religious traditions serve in the military, and the chaplain's task is to ensure freedom of religion for every service member. If a chaplain is unable to perform a specific religious rite, they are required to arrange for another clergy member to do so. This

creates an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust, and solidarity within the military community [4].

The level of religiosity in the U.S. population is relatively high. According to sociological surveys, over 90 % of Americans respond affirmatively to the question "Do you believe in God?". The religiosity level among service members corresponds roughly to the national average, so the presence of clergy within U.S. military units is not questioned [3].

The U.S. Army Chaplain Corps was established by an act of Congress on July 29, 1775, upon the recommendation of George Washington. Until the mid-19th century, the corps consisted exclusively of Protestant ministers, but later Catholic clergy were admitted. In the 20th century, Orthodox and Jewish chaplains joined, and by the end of World War II, there were more than 8,000 chaplains in the U.S. Army. By the early 21st century, representatives of other faiths – particularly Islam and Buddhism – had also become part of the corps [4].

Today, approximately 3,000 religious organizations operate in the United States, representing nearly all world faiths. Soldiers and officers of the U.S. Armed Forces profess hundreds of religions, many of which are nontraditional, though the majority of chaplains represent the main denominations (Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish, and Muslim) and primarily serve their own congregations [3].

By law, the U.S. Navy, Army, and Air Force are all required to maintain chaplaincy services. Each branch's chaplaincy is headed by a Chief of Chaplains, who reports directly to the Secretary of Defense. The coordination of chaplain activities across the services is ensured by the Armed Forces Chaplains Board.

American chaplains work not only with service members but also with their families. They provide counseling in crisis situations, assist in overcoming post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and support families of the fallen. During the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, chaplains played a major role in sustaining morale. Worship services were conducted even in field conditions; chaplains accompanied units during operations and helped soldiers cope with fear and exhaustion. Experience shows that communication with a chaplain often became the key factor preventing service members from falling into severe psychological crises [3].

European models of chaplaincy service have their own distinctive features. In Germany, military

chaplaincy functions based on state agreements with Christian denominations, which guarantees the independence of chaplains from military command [1]. This allows chaplains to act autonomously, protecting the spiritual interests of service members. Both Catholic and Protestant chaplains serve in the Bundeswehr, and since 2021, military rabbis have also been introduced – an important step toward inclusivity and recognition of religious diversity [12]. In addition to their spiritual duties, German chaplains actively participate in moral and ethical education, conduct lectures and tolerance training, and assist in preventing radicalization among service members [7].

In the United Kingdom, a long-standing tradition of military chaplaincy has been preserved and has evolved to meet new challenges. British Army chaplains receive training in specialized institutions, where they study theological disciplines, psychology, crisis counseling, and the skills necessary to serve in multinational units [2]. They accompany military units on deployments, peacekeeping missions, and in combat operations.

A distinctive feature of the British model is its emphasis on the moral dimension: the chaplain serves not only as a priest and a trusted confidant for soldiers but also as an advisor to the command. Each branch of the British Armed Forces has its own regulatory framework governing chaplaincy activity. Issues related to chaplaincy in the Royal Air Force are defined in the Queen's Regulations for the Royal Air Force (5th edition, 1999). The main provisions concerning naval chaplaincy are contained in the Queen's Regulations for the Royal Navy (revised 2017) and the Armed Forces (Naval Chaplains) Regulations of 2009. In the Army, chaplaincy is regulated by the Army Chaplains Act of 1868 and the Queen's Regulations for the Army (1975).

Poland possesses a deep religious tradition, primarily Catholic, which significantly influences the organization of military chaplaincy. Polish chaplains are active not only within military units but also participate in social programs aimed at supporting veterans and their families, as well as facilitating the reintegration of former service members into civilian life. They closely cooperate with psychologists and medical staff, take part in rehabilitation programs, and enjoy a high level of trust among personnel (PubMed Central, 2021). The Polish model represents a synthesis of

traditional religious practice with modern forms of social work.

Canada offers an interesting multifaith model of military chaplaincy similar to that of the United States. Canadian chaplains provide spiritual support to service members regardless of denominational affiliation. They are deeply involved in psychological support and suicide prevention programs within the armed forces. Recent research indicates that Canadian chaplains are increasingly integrated into interdisciplinary teams of psychologists and social workers, becoming an essential part of the army's moral health system [9].

Chaplaincy plays a particularly important role within the multinational structures of NATO. Personnel serving in NATO missions come from diverse countries and religious backgrounds, which necessitates a specific interfaith approach. Chaplains act as spiritual mentors, mediators in intercultural dialogue, and advisors to commanders on religious and cultural matters. They organize interfaith prayers, ensure access to religious services for members of different faiths, and provide guidance to commanders to prevent cultural or religious conflicts.

According to studies published in 2025, NATO chaplains are considered a strategic resource, as they ensure the moral resilience and spiritual readiness of personnel – capacities that cannot be achieved solely through medical or psychological services [6].

NATO chaplaincy is also deeply integrated into psychological support programs. Modern initiatives involve chaplains in preparing service members for stress conditions, working with their families, and preventing PTSD. During NATO missions in Afghanistan, chaplains organized peer-support groups that allowed soldiers to speak openly about their experiences, becoming one of the key factors in maintaining unit cohesion and combat readiness [3].

The Ukrainian context of military chaplaincy holds particular significance amid the ongoing war. The Law of Ukraine "On Military Chaplaincy" (2021) established the legal foundations for the activity of chaplains in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. However, the war has demonstrated the urgent need for further institutional development of this service. Ukrainian chaplains operate directly on the front lines, provide spiritual support to service members, conduct religious services in field conditions, and assist families of the fallen.

They serve as spiritual leaders of their units and as reliable advisors to commanders in ensuring the spiritual readiness of personnel.

Moreover, recent research confirms that chaplaincy activity within the Armed Forces of Ukraine strengthens morale and maintains the psychological stability of military personnel [8, 9]. Thus, there is a clear need for the active expansion and systemic development of the Chaplaincy Service based on the assessed needs of the Armed Forces, as well as on appropriate legal and organizational mechanisms. An important feature of Ukrainian chaplaincy is its interfaith character: the Armed Forces include service members of diverse religious beliefs, and therefore, chaplaincy – in both content and form – must be interdenominational. This approach aligns with NATO standards while also reflecting Ukraine's national religious diversity.

### Conclusions

The analysis of international experience demonstrates that military chaplaincy constitutes an integral component of modern armed forces, ensuring the moral, psychological, and spiritual resilience of the army. The American and Canadian models exemplify the strength of an interfaith approach; the British and German models reflect a balance between the independence of the clergy and their integration into the military structure; while the Polish and Israeli models emphasize a close connection with national traditions.

For Ukraine, which remains in a state of war, the development of military chaplaincy holds strategic significance. It should be interdenominational, integrated into the system of psychological support and rehabilitation, and focused on maintaining the spiritual readiness of service members. The adoption of best international practices while preserving national identity will provide a foundation for forming a modern institution of military chaplaincy capable of strengthening the nation's defense capability.

Further research should aim at developing a structural and functional model of military chaplaincy within the Armed Forces of Ukraine, which will contribute to enhancing the country's overall defense capacity.

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### **ДОСВІД КАПЕЛАНСЬКОГО СЛУЖІННЯ У ЗБРОЙНИХ СИЛАХ ПРОВІДНИХ КРАЇН СВІТУ**

*Систематично досліджено досвід капеланського служіння у збройних силах провідних держав світу з акцентом на багатофункціональність ролі військових капеланів у сучасному бойовому й цивільному середовищах. Проаналізовано історичні витоки і процес інституціоналізації військового духовного служіння, просліджено шлях від початкових форм опіки до сучасних багатопрофільних модельних схем. Розглянуто окремі національні моделі (американська, британська, німецька, польська, канадська та ізраїльська), їхні структурні особливості, канали підбору й підготовки капеланів, етичні стандарти, взаємодію з військово-політичним керівництвом та системою охорони здоров'я.*

*Важливий акцент зроблено на ролі капеланів у НАТО та суміжних структурах як ключових осіб підтримки моральної стійкості, духовної готовності, психологічної адаптації та соціальної інтеграції військовослужбовців у складних операційних умовах. Проаналізовано аспекти міжконфесійної компетентності та міжрелігійної взаємодії, а також роль військових капеланів у заходах психологічної підтримки військовослужбовців.*

*Крім того, розглянуто сучасний український контекст: оцінено проблеми, пов'язані зі становленням військового капеланства в умовах повномасштабної війни, його юридичні межі, управлінські виклики, ресурси та стратегії інтеграції служби військового капеланства у Збройні Сили України. Стаття ґрунтується на сучасних наукових дослідженнях та публікаціях 2020–2025 рр., зокрема на порівняльних аналізах провідних країн та оглядах міжнародного досвіду, що дає змогу узагальнити найактуальніші практики і запропонувати конкретні орієнтири для України щодо розвитку й удосконалення військового капеланства в умовах сучасного військово-політичного середовища.*

**Ключові слова:** капелан, військова капеланська діяльність, моральна підтримка, психологічна підтримка, духовна готовність, духовний лідер, сучасний досвід.

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