

“A SERVING UNIVERSITY”

The program of Taras Dobko for participation in the selection process of a rector for
Ukrainian Catholic University

Bear one another's burdens...

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Ukraine today is living through an exceptional time. Today we say with pride that we trust the Armed Forces of Ukraine, we believe in the victory of our defenders over the invader, we believe in preserving independence and the renewal of Ukraine's territorial integrity. But our faith in “victory after the victory” is a challenge. It's more complicated to talk of confidence in our ability to build a democratic and wealthy country which will be a place for the dignified life of all Ukrainians.

UCU is called to be a prophetic example of all the best things Ukraine can be. This will not happen by itself. As our soldiers must achieve victory with their own hands, at the cost of their lives and health, in the same way, no one except us will ensure a dignified life in Ukraine. No one except us will make our university what the founders envisioned and about which we continue to dream. This will depend on the abilities and efforts of each one for whom our Ukraine is close to one's heart and for whom our UCU is dear.

UCU was the dream of people who didn't fear hardships or hesitated to swim against the current or sought the path of least resistance. These were, above all, Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky, Patriarchs Josyf Slipyj, Myroslav Ivan Lubachivsky, and Lubomyr Husar. From these roots we should draw strength for our minds, hearts, and hands, remembering the 2 M's (the martyrs and the marginalized), also our motto to witness, serve, and communicate, and the conviction that true education is not about filling the head with abstract concepts but learning “how to use three languages: the language of the mind, the language of the heart, and the language of the hands.”

Recently some colleagues and I spent time in the east of our country, visiting academic circles as well as church and civil organizations in Kharkiv, Dnipro, and Zaporizhzhia. This was an opportunity to feel the pulse of partner universities which are undergoing difficult times; volunteers who play a key role not only in the material but also the moral support of soldiers; and our graduates, staff, and friends serving in the army.

The challenges we will face after victory are gigantic. More and more people turn to UCU – representative of the government, the Church, civil society, academia – with numerous proposals as to what and how UCU can respond to urgent needs. Our

resources are limited, and it is also with great responsibility that we must approach the determination of UCU's contribution. On the other hand, it's necessary to search for and invite for cooperation mature people prepared to take on themselves the burden of responsibility and, together with UCU, to solve society's urgent problems.

What to do?

In my opinion, in the next 5 years our community is called to demonstrate its leadership in three areas: **healing the wounds of war and renewing/modernizing Ukraine, promoting the Ukrainian agenda in the world, and creating a spiritual Christian proposal for the human person of the 21st century.** These themes should penetrate the main areas of our activity: **education, research, and service.** They also become criteria for evaluating the importance and relevance of any concrete projects and initiatives.

The war leaves more than one scar on the body of our country and in the souls of our people. Rehabilitation directed at healing the human body and soul, and the reintegration of the person in the life of society, will play a key role in revitalizing Ukrainian society. **Our community must draw closer to human needs; active solidarity should be our way of life and work.** Our university is called to play a key role in rebuilding and modernizing Ukraine. The complex tasks of post-war renewal will demand brave ideas, talented specialists, and the effective mobilization of all resources. In addition, UCU's task will be also to recall that, as victory in war was impossible without mobilization on the level of generating significant meanings, so also it will be impossible to progress in modernization if one looks at it essentially as a technical assignment. **Our university is called to testify that principles matter and that the revival of our country is not possible without dedication to the principles of human dignity and integral human development.**

The international community has shown admirable solidarity with Ukraine, which is indicated by the desire to know and understand our country better, to go beyond the headlines and, importantly, to listen to the Ukrainian voice. Today the Ukrainian experience of love of freedom and resilience can speak to the whole world; from within the Ukrainian experience one can speak about what matters to all. Today Ukraine is in the center of international attention. We are called to strengthen this involvement after our victory. The question of a just peace and the new security architecture, the management of migration, transitional justice, the renewal of the cultural heritage, the development of resilience, and the overcoming of trauma cannot be considered without taking into account and studying the Ukrainian experience, of which UCU can and should be a reliable bearer and competent interpreter.

Our experience should become a source of hope for the world, to give it back faith in absolute values, heal it from cynicism and excessive attachment to comfort. True values become visible not when everything is good and life goes easy for us, but when things turn difficult for us. Values guide us and determine our behavior when life turns its dark side to us. Ukraine is teaching the West that safety cannot be an end in itself, that it should not sacrifice values for the sake of safety, and that democracy deserves to be defended at the cost of one's comfort, health, and even life.

Our task as *Ukrainian Catholic University* is to help assure the world's interest in Ukraine and make it permanent. Our task as *Ukrainian Catholic University* is to demonstrate the importance of living in truth and working for justice, in accord with Gospel principles and the divine order of things. The gap between declared values and actual behavior can deprive a whole society of the sources of its moral strength and the ability to resist evil and violence. Because, if one does not live in accord with principles, there is nothing from which to draw strength in times of trial.

In many countries, the Christian worldview is already not part of the mainstream life of society and culture. It often is found on the margins of worldview propositions and belongs rather to a counter-culture than what is taken for granted. **UCU is called to offer the Christian witnessing as a convincing alternative.** No one needs a secularized UCU, and it would be of no use.

Our Christian witness should be lively and authentic, but not defensive or only apologetic. It should be free and prophetic, provide meaning to our scholarly research, influence the design and details of our educational programs, and guide mutual relations among students, professors, staff, graduates, benefactors, and partners of the university. The existence of a Dean's Office for Pastoral Affairs, Faculty of Theology, church buildings and schedule of religious services by itself cannot be accepted as sufficient witness to UCU's Christian identity. **A solid, wide, and differentiated Christian spiritual proposal** is needed, which will meet the person where he or she is and respond to the questions which concern our society.

Our task is not only to share with our community and Ukrainian society the treasures of the Church Social Teaching, the ideas and achievements of its glorious predecessors (like Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky), who shaped the history of world and Ukrainian Christianity. UCU is called to be "a cultural laboratory where an active re-thinking of reality is happening, in the light of Christ's Gospel; **"where theologians, philosophers, and scholars from various fields of human knowledge"** – **"with open mind and praying on their knees"** – **implement a cultural revolution;** where a wide dialogue goes on between believers and non-believers for the good of the human person; where the academic community becomes a co-creator of the Church, which goes to society's margins and serves it."

All the faculties and academic programs are called to define their concrete contribution to healing the wounds of war and renewing Ukraine, the promotion of the Ukrainian agenda in the world, and the creation of a vital spiritual Christian proposition for the human person of the 21st century.

How to do this?

Thanks to the ministries of Fr. Mykhailo Dymyd, Archbishop Borys Gudziak, and Fr. Bohdan Prach, today our university is in good shape; it stands on solid foundations; it has a unique character, recognizable and authoritative. **This is also a consequence of the Rectorate's teamwork, our staff and students' feeling of belonging to a community and their involvement in service to a great cause, our readiness to work hard, to share and to learn, and not to be indifferent to each other's problems.** Such an institutional culture does not happen by itself. It should not be taken as a given. It needs to be worked on and desired.

In the last year, UCU's workload has increased three times, but the community has managed to operate well, and it keeps making its contribution to Ukraine's victory. Most of our projects and goals passed the test of the war. Despite brutal realities, we have been able to carry out our obligations to students, professors, and staff. Education has continued at a level of quality, no one has been fired from job, we have continued to invest in people and financially supported them. We have not allowed stagnation, neither objectively nor psychologically. We did not lose a lot of people to emigration. And we continue to develop.

In 2020, UCU approved Strategy-2025, aimed at **the development of the university as a community that serves.** In my opinion, this goal is even more relevant today, and it should be taken into account when developing the new strategy which the university is already working on now. **We should continue to strive to be a serving university.**

Where can we find the strength for such service? UCU is called to do this in friendship with God, inviting young people to walk with God, to awaken their enthusiasm for communion with Christ. **UCU is a mission territory.** Here young people have an opportunity to make mistakes, inasmuch as a mistake, rather than faultlessness, is sometimes necessary for spiritual growth. It is extremely important, while not rejecting the radicalism of the Christian way of life, which becomes a stone of contradiction for our contemporaries permeated with expressive individualism, not to transform Christianity into an ideology, a weapon for waging an ideological war with opponents. Myroslav Marynovych calls this trap "ownership of the truth." Unfortunately, this often happens to "church communities for which 'truth' is a cold ideological formula, and not warm love... For such Christians, 'truth' is a sword by which they inflict wounds, not a balsam which heals them. Such 'truth' brings them to

the height of pride, which leads to the harshness of uniformity.” So, Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky calls upon: “In our society, most often occur sins of slander (and gossip), sins of argument (hatred), sins of complaining (about all of life’s hardships and regrets), sins of falsehood. Maybe it would be good to advise souls that want to live perfectly that they take an oath not to gossip, not to argue, not to complain, not to speak falsehood.” (The decree *“About those who live according to evangelical counsels,”* 1940.)

Our vocation at UCU is to reveal to people prospects for a dignified life in which there is a prominent place for God and neighbor. **UCU must serve as a vital place for the evangelization of students and professors.** We will fulfill our mission if sometime among UCU’s graduates appears a Ukrainian Chesterton, Lewis, and Tolkien, and their Ukrainian names will be no less recognized in the world.

Higher education today faces the challenge of radical changes. The global competition for talent, the rapid development of artificial intelligence, the appearance of entrepreneurial players in the educational market, more and more demands of society for the accountability of educational institutions, and threats of pandemic create significant pressure on educational institutions and their ability to carry out their mission appropriately. Under the influence of the war and its challenges, young Ukrainians are looking for knowledge, which is the most relevant in these circumstances, which can help them better understand what is happening and find their own way under conditions of global uncertainty. So, on the one hand, UCU must build an institutional culture open to innovation and experiments in education. On the other, a key criterion for evaluating the feasibility and success of their introduction should be the goal of the integral development of the student and the young person’s awareness of the importance of the common good.

This also means that we need more actively to share the unique achievements gained at UCU in previous years. The Core Program, the pedagogy of service learning, the experience of the living learning community in the Collegium, the employee performance evaluation system, based on the behavioral virtues and competencies of the employee, the graduate profile, based on the holistic development of a young person, and much more should be shared not only among other Ukrainian universities, but also with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine as educational and management models for improving the academic culture in Ukraine.

It is worthwhile **to continue experimenting** – with flexible trajectories of study (in particular, micro-credentials), programs with a “hybrid” format, forms of education rooted in real life (project-oriented, problem-oriented, etc.). For this, courage and professional preparation is required of professors, who can achieve this through **development of teaching and management skills.** UCU should serve as a resource

center for active and engaged teaching, where each professor should become a master at least in one method of engaged teaching, and at the same time be ready to share expertise with colleagues at UCU and beyond.

The call to serve should help UCU on the way of implementing the model of a **socially engaged university**. One of the key signs of a socially responsible university is attention to the signs of the times and an ability to react to them authoritatively and with dignity. Perhaps the worst that can happen to an academic community is to become an ivory tower, concerned only with self-preservation, or a country club concerned more with its own prestige than its contribution to the community's development. At any cost, it should avoid the feeling of self-satisfaction and complacency that everything is fine with us, that we can be elevated and rest on a pedestal. For it's very easy to become arrogant when entrants have high test scores and you have a comfortable infrastructure and numerous friends. So, if others put UCU on a pedestal, our community should learn to come down, to make examinations of conscience, to get closer to human needs, to dare the way of the cross. **We don't make a mistake if we help someone. An unmistakable criterion for life in Christ is being close to the poor.**

Psychologists say that a person only becomes mature when he or she assumes certain responsibilities. It's important that, while studying at the university, students have an opportunity to assume responsibility. Noted Polish film director Krzysztof Zanussi gave a wonderful definition of what it means to be "elite" – not to be fixated on narrow private interests, but to be open to the common good. This echoes the words of Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky: "As long as Ukrainians think more about their own individual good in matters of the nation, so long will it be impossible to successfully develop common good. Because this common good will simply not exist, as they will not be in the consciousness and conscience of the people." (Pastoral letter, *"Thou shalt not kill,"* 1942.)

Genuine education does not lead to making one more and more independent of others, but rather helps one overcome one's weaknesses and find something bigger than one's self, for the sake of which the person is ready to live. A human being cannot live to the full without ideals which give inspiration, energy, and stimulus. "When a grain of wheat falls into the ground without dying, it remains one; but when it dies, it bears abundant fruit." There is abundant fruit when we are ready to serve one another!

So we will continue to develop **service learning** and introduce a **civic governance program** in order to encourage our graduates to choose to serve in politics, and structures of government, including local ones. One of UCU's key areas of activity will be **revitalizing communities** – strengthening the abilities of local

communities for their renewal and development after the war. This also flows out of the Church Social Teaching with its principle of subsidiarity – problems in a person’s life should, maximally, be solved at the level of the local community, without appeal to anonymous authorities at a regional or national level. Our university should play a leading role in the **development of culture of good governance** in Ukraine through programs in management, aimed at academic managers and heads of schools, leaders of health care institutions, etc. Our task is to continue the development of culture and rebuild an ecosystem of entrepreneurship.

In relations with others, we are called to be guided by the imperative of cooperation, **the win-win logic**, based on the trust to God, His presence and engagement with the world. We should rely on our natural allies: (1) development of the network of graduates and enlisting them as our partners; (2) development of deep national and international academic partnerships, forming a network of “ambassadors” for Ukraine; (3) active cooperation with the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, strengthening of its leadership potential and implementing the UGCC Pastoral Plan for the year 2030.

Our university was born in the heart of the UGCC and the Ukrainian Christian tradition. UCU should feel that it is the heir of Kyivan Christianity and be a co-creator of the Church, which goes to the margins of society and serves it. The UGCC, a global church, and UCU, a global university, are called to support and strengthen one another, to serve one another. We are counting on friendly solidarity, on the common pilgrimage in service to God and people.

Despite all the advantages of a smaller university, one of UCU’s essential limitations is a lack of resources for research and the difficulty of forming competitive research groups. On the other hand, this forces us maximally to focus and look for formats in which **research becomes an interdisciplinary, international and team-based work**.

Research in an international context is a wonderful field to gather world best practices, models, and thoughts around Ukrainian development. It’s necessary to form international teams which, together with our scholars, can work to find ways to modernize Ukraine. The world’s attention is now mostly focused on Ukraine’s trauma. Eventually, through scholarship we will be able to switch this to the Ukrainian advance. On the other hand, where in the world we see trauma and have recipes for healing it, we cannot remain on the sidelines but should take an active part. By integrating research into the international context, Ukraine has a chance to affirm itself as a global country.

Another important task is to help our scholars find external research grants. The establishment of a R&D office could encourage this. The activities of the UCU Research

Fund should become an active instrument to stimulate quality international publications, involve students in professors' research projects, get them interested in analytical work. Research should be practical, aimed at searching for forms of social innovations which can improve society. Each article, monograph, experiment, and technological decision before publication should not only answer its own research question but also the question of how it responds to societal challenges. It is worthwhile to continue the practice of scholarly commissions to encourage research in areas of priority for UCU: theology, church history, and Kyivan Christianity. UCU will continue to develop PhD programs with the goal of their institutionalization in a Doctoral School.

Our university's greatest riches are people. In coming years, it will be necessary to work in conditions of a brain drain from Ukraine and from an education sector. Despite these circumstances, the university has to make significant steps in **building resilience, sustainability, and flexibility**.

In opposition to general tendencies during the war, **UCU must become a magnet for talent**, encourage a brain gain by way of actively enlisting professionals from abroad, ready to build up their professional skills and expertise, working to renew Ukraine. We should become a hospitable environment for international guests, experts, PhD candidates or professors, learning to invite and enlist them in our common work.

Focused work on **the professional development of our personnel**, concern for their welfare and a dignified reward for their work, directed efforts at more financial stability (increasing the reserve, fundraising, introducing a model of full payment for study balanced with scholarships for the needy, etc.) continue to be important areas of our activity. We will continue to work on introducing a data-driven culture and management skills; improving the effectiveness of our work in education and management with the help of UCU's digital transformation. To increase our contribution and influence, we will need new classrooms, also places where participants in the educational process will live, space for working together and communicating – in a word, the expansion of the campus.

Why is UCU so different?

People often ask us why UCU is so different. Of course, our university is grounded on values and principles, great traditions and big dreams. But, above all, people and their relationships create it. Values and principles are declarations, until they are lived and until they guide real people in their relations with one another. At UCU, a community operates which strives to build **authentic and living human**

relations. To preserve this identity of UCU will demand incredible efforts. And new challenges will demand no less than this.

Who is a person of UCU? Not someone who, in the words of Ivan Lypa, has “jealous eyes, grabbing hands, a nose to the wind.” A person of UCU is our Vice-Rector for University Mission **Myroslav Marynovych**, who sacrificed 10 of the most productive years of life because he wanted to live in the truth; he remained faithful to his conscience and to his true self. A person of UCU is our graduate **Artemiy Dymyd**, who sacrificed his young life in the war for independence, to give us the opportunity and chance to live freely and with dignity. A person of UCU is our guard **Roman Vus**, who daily with humor and a good word (a blessing) greets students, staff, and guests of the university. A person of UCU is our leading historian and vice-rector **Ihor Skochylias**, who was a mentor and friend for students, a man of high scholarship and deep faith, an example of sacrifice for Ukrainian identity and openness to the wide world. A person of UCU is Professor **Ulyana Holovatch**, uncompromising in academic standards, with love for students, a passion for the humanities and faith in the power of the liberal arts to humanize people. Our UCU relies on many such people, and, thanks to such people, we dare to aspire to greatness and, when necessary, to go against the flow.

UCU is one of the best things that could have happened in my life. This is a gift of God, a blessing, and a formation program. What have I learned thanks to UCU? God owes us nothing. Everything is a gift. People, buildings, resources, salaries, ideas. UCU might not have existed. What were the chances for the institution, from a human point of view – without reserves, without any state support, without premises – to transform into today’s UCU?!

But what is impossible with people is possible with God! If you don’t take it for granted, don’t grab credit for achievements and complain about limitations, don’t denigrate one another, don’t place a crown on your head and grab the chair... If you work much, bear one another’s burdens, foster the community and spirit of service, love students and honor human dignity... If you aspire to greatness and rejoice in small things...

Today we live in debt, with the sense of borrowed time, acquired for us by our defenders. This should be productive time, where our first priority task as an academic community is to generate hope – a vision of the future of our country and the ability to implement it.

Our community is called to imagine and to show what Ukraine should be like in its post-war future. The creation and implementation of an inspiring vision of a re-born country is a key responsibility of a serving university. **“We cannot and must not lose hope in better times. Instead of despairing, get to work.”** (Patriarch Lubomyr Husar)