



## **‘OCU’ supporters continue seizing church buildings of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Rovno region**

The Information and Education Department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church reports that on Sunday, 14 April 2019, divine service began at eight in the morning with a hundred of parishioners in attendance at the Church of Ss Cosmas and Damian in the village of Rozvazh, Ostrog district, Rovno region.

An hour later, supporters of ‘OCU’ put up a fight and tried to seize the church building. ‘They gripped parishioners’ arms and hairs; torn their clothes; children fell down. Police shepherded the intruders out of the church and we could continue the service, but they made another attack and began to beat people. This time police did not interfere,’ a parishioner named Valentina said.

She added that there were 120 OCU supporters, including those bussed in and the locals who either never go to church or go once or twice a year. Yet they tried to prove their rights to the church building by showing documents which confirm registration of the OCU community in it.

Valentina continued to say, ‘I wonder how they can talk about their rights. We, the parishioners, the real community, never took any decision and felt helpless before these robbers. Members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church living in the vicinity started coming to our village to render support, but they could not get to the territory as the gates were locked, while the parishioners were shut in the church together with an aggressive crowd of the OCU supporters who tore off the locks, beat people and began to make an inventory of the property which does not belong to them.’

This was not the first seizure incident in the Rovno region.

On April 10, the OCU supporters tried to seize the Church of St. John the Theologian in the village of Kopytov. After a long confrontation the parishioners were forced to seal the church until a judicial decision is made. On April 13, the OCU activists and police forces put up a fight with the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church who were praying in the church yard.

In disregard for agreement with the state authorities and police forces, the OCU activists stormed into the church, considering themselves its owners.

“In the morning our faithful gathered near the church and after the liturgy and requiem service began to read an akathistos hymn,” a parishioner Irina Balk said. “All of a sudden our opponents began to arrive. We stood at the entrance, they started beating us, police did not interfere for several minutes, but then

began to throw our people from the staircase; our priest was thrown out of the gates and beaten by the activists as if they were going to oust him from the village. After that the supporters of the new structure opened the locks and entered the church. “

The villagers say that officials, and not only from the district, guided the process.

“They have worked out detailed plans and incited hatred in the village. A district deputy shows police a document and said that the OCU representatives were the only owners of the church,” Irina added.

Archpriest Viktor Zemlianoy, head of the Committee for the settlement of interconfessional disputes in the Rovno diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, believes that the dispute in the village of Kopytov was a contract hit.

‘Representatives of the Security Service of Ukraine were present; our faithful asked them to introduce themselves, but they did not give their names, only ranks. These two persons without names were telling police what to do,’ Fr Viktor said.

On April 2, the OCU activists broke into the church house in the village of Kurozvany, Goscha district, which was a home church for the parishioners of the seized Church of the Intercession for over a month, and carried the altar with the Holy Sacraments into the street.

Archpriest Vladimir Koval, rector of the seized church, left the village with his family a day earlier. He had to leave the house in which he lived over twenty years to provide the parishioners with the place for worship.

Archpriest Mikhail Petrov, dean of the Goscha deanery, said: “I can only call the today’s event in Kurozvany madness and travesty over the holy place. We managed to keep our community. Over one hundred worshippers came to the temporary church on Sunday. Now I know where to seek the truth. A religious community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has ownership rights in the church house, but documents, people and the law are disregarded.

The situation in the village is precarious. Police does not do anything; the OCU supporters lay down ‘rules of the game.’

The activist seized the Church of the Intercession in Kurozvany on March 1, 2019, and cut the locks on the pretext of inventory. Police did not attempt to stop them. Officials from the Goscha district administration entered the church, stayed there for fifteen minutes allegedly for making an inventory, while the activists went to the house of rector and demanded that he should move from the house.

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