



Approximately three thousand Orthodox Christians gather for prayerful vigil in Lutsk

On 28 February 2019, some three thousand faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church gathered for prayerful vigil at the Volyn Regional State Administration in Lutsk in order to defend their right to freedom of religion, the UOC Information and Education Department reports.

The faithful were led by Metropolitan Vladimir of Vladimir-Volynsky and Kovel and Bishop Nafanail of Volyn and Lutsk.

For several hours the Orthodox Christians were reading akathists to the Most Holy Theotokos and lifting up prayers for peace and welfare of Ukraine, as well as for the Ukrainian people, authorities and the armed forces.

Regrettably, the chairperson of the Volyn Regional State Administration did not show up. As those gathered were informed, he was not in his office. During the meeting, an official appeal of the UOC Volyn and Vladimir-Volynsky dioceses to chairpersons of the Volyn Regional State Administration and the regional council was read out. Representatives of the regional department for culture promised to hand over the document to the addressees.

Beings citizens of Ukraine, the residents of the Volyn region appealed to the officials, demanding to take measures in response to the critical situation that had arisen in some parishes of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the region.

“To our great regret, in the territory of the districts that make up the diocese of Vladimir-Volynsky and especially the diocese of Volyn of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, during seizures of our church building there were established outrageous facts of kindling religious enmity and hatred and insulting the feelings of citizens on religious grounds, as well as of attacks on clergymen and laypeople, of presenting false information about us, and of criminal inactivity of law enforcement agencies,” the appeal says, in particular.

Local officials are grossly violating the adopted bill No. 4128-d, which must regulate the process of changing parishes’ jurisdictions. “Moreover, representatives of local councils are actively involved in “transfers,” setting village council seals to the “minutes of parishioners’ meetings,” while ignoring the results of lawful assemblies of religious communities. In some of the most impressive incidents local officials personally attack the UOC church buildings and cut off locks, often in the presence of law

enforcement officers,” the appeal continues.

Having expressed their indignation over these facts, the community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the Volyn region – episcopate, clerics, monastics and laypeople – put forward a number of demands:

“To stop lawless actions, to restore citizens’ respect for the legislation of Ukraine in religious sphere; to bring to justice the officials of the regional state administration and heads of local government bodies who grossly interfere in religious affairs, deceive people and are personally involved in seizures of the UOC church buildings; to stop acts of aggression against the UOC monasteries and churches in the region; that law enforcement officers fulfill their direct duties and put an end to criminal inactivity in the cases when attackers openly beat people, taking advantage of their helplessness and often weakness and advanced age; to resolve inter-confessional issues by lawful means; to stop tendentious closures of the UOC parishes that legitimately functioned in the territories of state and municipal institutions; to restore the UOC communities’ access to their church buildings which are still blocked and seized.”

The appeal concludes that disregard for these demands will be considered as a violation of human rights and an aggravation of the critical situation surrounding the inter-confessional relations in the region.

However, that day did not go by without provocations. Covering this event, some of the mass media reported that “the UOC opponents gathered at the Volyn council.” Ignoring the prayerful vigil in which thousands of people took part, some journalists traditionally covered this event from perspective, advantageous to them. The mass media’s attention was drawn by less than ten “activists,” the OCU supporters, who were holding banners kindling enmity and insulting believers’ feelings. At the same time, the mass media showed no interest in the gathering of thousands of the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the Volyn region who came to defend their lawful right to the freedom of religion.

DECR Communication Service

Source: <https://mospat.ru/en/news/46583/>