



Schism supporters and police beat up rector of canonical Church's community in Western Ukraine

On February 3, 2019, supporters of the "Orthodox church of Ukraine" started a scuffle at the Church of the Holy Transfiguration in Gnezdichno village, Zbarazh district, Ternopol region. Beaten most severely by heavy-built men with red and black stripes on their sleeves and by the police was the rector of the religious community of the canonical Church, Archpriest Stefan Balan, Education and Information Department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church reports.

In the morning, prior to the Liturgy, the so-called "activists" gathered near the church, carried out a provocation and disrupted the divine service celebrated by the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

It was known the day before that unlawful actions were being planned. "We warned the administration and the police that a conflict situation was being planned. We wrote a statement against interference in religious affairs. They brought together all their deputies on Friday, but took no decision. Maybe they were afraid, I do not know," Archpriest Stefan Balan said.

Having realized that a seizure of the church was being planned, members of the religious community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church gathered on the church's stairs. Later, a representative of the local

authorities arrived. The chairman of the village council who supported the “activists” addressed the crowd. “Yet, these people were so aggressive that, not understanding what he was saying, they began to insult him too. He got nervous, dropped keys and left,” the priest also said. According to him, the official wanted to hand over the keys to OCU supporters, but was shocked to be treated like that and left the territory of the church.

The police interfered, siding with the provokers. “A special police squad arrived quickly, and they started beating us. They were beating me, pushing the parishioners. Then some men in uniform with red and black stripes on their sleeves came and began to push us all away. They grabbed my head and broke a finger. We called an ambulance. Medical staff confirmed that I had injuries all over my body – head, chest, hands,” the rector of the Holy Transfiguration Church added.

It should be noted that on January 13, the activists held a village meeting. Some of those present voted in favour of the transfer to the newly established “Orthodox church of Ukraine,” but the religious community decided to remain in the bosom of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. As the rector had reported earlier, the parties had reached an agreement of peaceful coexistence. OCU representatives promised that there would be no seizure of the church building of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

However, the principal of a local school could not put up with it. It was he who provoked people into clashes, Archpriest Stefan believes. “The principal puts great pressure on teachers, gathers signatures and threatens to fire those who will come to my service,” Fr. Stefan said.

The representatives of the newly established structure also enjoyed support from the chief of the local police. Perhaps, there were instructions from higher authorities, Fr. Stefan assumes.

The Church of the Holy Transfiguration in Gnezdichno village was sealed up. The priest and the parishioners of the canonical Church celebrated a moleben at its doors.

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