



## **A hierarch of the Polish Orthodox Church visits the community of a church captured by schismatics in Ugrinov village**



On July 24, 2017, Archbishop George of Wroclaw and Szczecin, Polish Orthodox Church, and Bishop Nafanail of Volyn and Lutsk visited the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's community of the Elevations of the Cross at the village of Ugrinov, Volyn Region.

The high guests celebrated a thanksgiving at the house of Archpriest Rostislav Sapozhnik, in which the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church have to assemble for worship services after their church had been seized by schismatics. The hierarchs expressed support for and gratitude to the parishioners for their steadfastness in the faith.

The church of the Elevation of the Cross at the Ugrinov village was captured by representatives of the 'Kiev Patriarchate' on September 10, 2014. In summer 2015, the schismatics privatized the priest's house and in spring 2016 they managed to evict Archpriest Rostislav and his wife in spite of the fact that

their minor children lived in it. The legal battle over the capture of the church continues. Legal proceedings have been opened over the community's right to own the church house.

'The Polish Orthodox Church sympathizes with the situation of the Ukrainian Orthodox faithful. We are following all your news, both sad and joyful. We are aware of the persecution which you have endured with dignity and humbleness and pray that the Lord may put right what is going on', Archbishop George said to the faithful.

Bishop Nafanail, in his turn, firmly promised that the community would not be left without support. He stated that whatever the results of the legal battle for the parish property may be, the faithful in Ugrinov will always have a place for prayer and their priest will not be abandoned.

In an interview to the UOC information and education department, Archbishop George of Wroclaw stressed once again that people in Poland followed the inter-confessional conflicts in Ukraine with pain and would keep supporting the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. In particular, he condemned the fact that the Filaret's schismatics established the so-called 'Kiev Patriarchate' and 'European Exarchate', stressing that Local Churches did not recognize it. 'The status of the validity and canonicity of Orthodoxy lies precisely in that it is recognized by other Local Churches. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church guided by His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine is recognized by all the Churches', the hierarch said.

Referring to his personal talks with representatives of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, Archbishop George described as impossible the scenario whereby Constantinople would recognize the schismatic, so-called 'Kiev Patriarchate' at a request of the Supreme Rada. 'I have no right to voice all that was discussed in personal talks with representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate', he said, 'but I can note that in my repeated talks with hierarchs and even the Patriarch himself I have never heard such statements from them. I had an opportunity to participate in the process of preparations for the Council on Crete and in many other conferences and commissions which considered this problem in the format of personal talks. All the Orthodox people are convinced that the granting of autocephaly to the so-called 'Kiev Patriarchate' is simply impossible; it is unacceptable to the Orthodox Church. Indeed, we have to deal with a very serious schism, the sin of unchurching, the violation of canons of the Orthodox Church'.

Archbishop George also noted that the Supreme Rada's discriminatory bills, which can deliver a serious blow on the position of the canonical Church, 'do not correspond with respect for the freedom of faith'. 'We have always seen Byzantine as a model of cooperation and common life of the state and the Church', he noted, 'There was a harmonious model of state-church cooperation, which is called synergy. This cooperation implies mutual respect and non-interference of the state in the affairs of the Church, or the Church in the affairs of the state. At the same time, we should remember that since in the

state there are also members of the Church, the Church expresses her opinion on many current issues’.

Answering to the question why the canonical Church refuses to participate in common prayers with people of different confessions, thus being often accused of an absence of patriotism and reluctance to pray for Ukraine together with other religious organizations, Archbishop George stated with confidence that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is ‘a true example of patriotism towards her country’ and underscored her independence. ‘In the world, there is no autonomous Orthodox Church which enjoys such broad rights as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church does, in which the Primate has the title of His Beatitude, in which there are so many bishops and so many monasteries – the fact that attests to the unity of Holy Rus’. It is very important’, he said.

Commenting on the captures of churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine, Archbishop George condemned the actions of the schismatics and expressed support for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and her faithful. ‘Violence has never expressed the Orthodox spirit. Orthodoxy is all-embracing love. Where there is violence there is no spirit of God. The fact that representatives of the so-called ‘Kiev Patriarchate’ seek to do all to preserve their identity here in Ukraine through violence is a proof of their sick condition... We prayerfully support the Primate, episcopate and all the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in their commitment to their canonicity. To be committed to the faith in a situation when churches are taken away is to acquire the crown of martyrdom. I stress once again that we condemn the actions of the schismatics because violence is a sign of the absence of Orthodox spirit’.

*DECR Communication Service*

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