



In the Ukrainian town of Ladyzhyn, a priest and parishioners were injured when raiders stormed their church



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Metropolitan Jonathan of Tulchyn and Bratslav has made a statement on the violation of religious rights and human freedoms in the Vinnytsia region of Ukraine in connection with the attempted forceful seizure of the church in honour of the Icon of the Mother of God of Kazan in the town of Ladyzhyn on the 28th of December 2023.

The Archpastor recalled that at one time that church was erected from ruins by members of the Orthodox community of Ladyzhyn and consecrated according to the Orthodox rite with the participation of a respected resident of Ladyzhyn, the first rector of the parish, Archpriest Sergius Malinovsky, whose remains now rest opposite the Altar part of the church. His widow is still a member of the religious community of the church and is the guardian of the grave of the late clergyman.

Among the raiders who broke open the doors of the church and tried to get inside, while literally stepping over the heads of members of the community, was a large number of people in military uniform, reads the Metropolitan's statement posted on the website of the Tulchyn diocese.

"During this rampage, the rector, Archpriest Eugene Vorobyov, and other members of the Orthodox community who were on duty, received bodily injuries (bruises and abrasions) from the rude actions of the law enforcers who arrived to seize the church", wrote Metropolitan Jonathan. He specified that some

of the law enforcers openly justified their actions from the position of religious intolerance: they rejected the allegedly "non-Ukrainian" religious customs of the community, referring to the use of the traditional Church Slavonic language in worship, rather than the state Ukrainian language, while ignoring the fact that the Church in that country is constitutionally separated from the state.

An attempt to seize the Kazan church was observed by clerics of the schismatic structure "Orthodox Church of Ukraine" from the city of Trostyanets, with the intention to unlawfully perform a religious rite in the church. They claimed to have state registration documents from the Vinnytsia regional administration, which were obtained as a result of a "vote" of a meeting of employees of a certain poultry farm, gathered at the initiative of one of the deputies of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine.

"Such substitution of Orthodox communities belonging to the [canonical] Ukrainian Orthodox Church by a private meeting of citizens is, unfortunately, a constant practice in order to artificially increase the number of parishes of the 'OCU', many of which subsequently do not fulfil their function, being closed due to the complete absence of people in them," the Archpastor stated.

Metropolitan Jonathan, who is a member of the coordinating council of the international human rights association "The Church against Xenophobia and Religious Discrimination", pointed out the communities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are thus practically and legally discriminated against and, not having traditional premises for the performance of Divine services, are forced to gather for common prayer in private houses or in cars adapted for this purpose.

As Vladyka Jonathan noted, the Ladyzhyn Orthodox religious community of the church dedicated to the Icon of the Mother of God of Kazan stands against the registrative manipulations of the Vinnytsia regional state authorities. "The community continues to exist. It filed a lawsuit in court long ago, defending its constitutional right to religious self-identification and freedom of religion in Ukraine," the hierarch emphasised, noting that the Orthodox communities of the Tulchyn diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are protesting against violence and anti-legal religious discrimination.

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