

## **Ukrainian Church set ablaze - police more interested in which Patriarchate it belongs to**



The Holy Trinity Church in the city of Rzhyshev in the Kiev Province of Ukraine, of the Belotserkov Diocese of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church was set ablaze in the morning of December 9, leaving the doors completely burned and the iconography damaged, reports the site of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

The parish rector Fr. George Gichki left the house at 7:00 AM yesterday to serve the Divine Liturgy and noticed the smoke billowing from the church and immediately called the fire company and the local police. When they arrived, the firefighters began extinguishing the burning doors, which were already nearly completely destroyed, and the right side of the church where the flames were coming from. Parishioners then started arriving and began to help put out the fire in the church that was filled with smoke.

Meanwhile, the police delayed in coming, arriving only after the fire was already

completely put out. As Fr. George explains, they were more interested in which patriarchate it belongs too—Moscow or “Kiev”—than in the fact that arson had been committed.

“One way or another, I see the indifferent and biased attitude of the police,” Fr. George said. “When I called to say the church was on fire, the operator, first of all, wanted to clarify which church. When I answered that it was ‘not a mosque, not a synagogue, but a church of God,’ they answered: ‘You don’t understand. Which patriarchate does the church belong to?’ How absurd, but a fact is a fact. The police are more interested in which patriarchate than in witness testimony and the suspect’s identity.”

When the police did finally arrive, they didn’t interview any witnesses at the scene. Only later was Fr. George summoned to the national police for questioning as a witness. The police informed him that he should not mention the fact that the church is an architectural monument of the 19th century, as it could complicate the situation for the clergy of the UOC, saying, “The state could impose a fine for not preserving the monument entrusted to the UOC.”

Further, the priest informed the police that he had seen the suspect stealing metal from the church territory the night before and had grabbed him and took it back. And despite the fact that the suspect had confessed in Fr. George’s presence that he had set some wastepaper on fire at the door of the church, which caused the blaze according to the fire department, the police insisted it was an “unintentional arson,” saying the suspect was “in a state of intoxication.”

The suspect is also currently under house arrest for “minor crimes” and has previously committed illegal actions against Holy Trinity Church, including the theft of parishioners’ donations. In that instance, the police did not open a case because of the “lack of documentation of the donations.” In regards to the fire, criminal proceedings under “Violation of the legal requirements of fire safety” and “arson” have been opened.









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