

UKRAINE: Odessa parishioners abandon Moscow and choose Kiev

The decision to follow the new autocephalous Church comes after a community debate and vote. Priests are braking. Determinants of the wounds of the war: the son of a parishioner is a prisoner of the Russians. "We cannot remain in a church that blesses the Cossacks and those who kill Ukrainians".

By Vladimir Rozanskij

AsiaNews (30.01.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2HIRZid> – The parishioners of the church of St. Demetrius in the village of Puzhajkovo, near Odessa, recently decided to leave the Moscow Patriarchate to join the new Ukrainian autocephalous Church. Leading the initiative was one of the parishioners, Viktor Soroka, father of one of the sailors arrested in the Kerch Strait incident on 25 November, when some Ukrainian ships were blocked by the Russians. Soroka's son is still held in a Russian prison.

The passage of the church had become a matter of honor for Viktor: "We must understand that after five years of war, today we cannot remain in a Church that blesses the Cossacks and those who kill the Ukrainians," he told the press. The decision on the change of jurisdiction was decided by a majority of the parishioners assembly.

Another voter, Larisa Cheban together with her whole family noted: "The vote was very transparent, we collected the signatures and no one quarreled; I think everything went very well ". According to Larisa, only one resident of the village voted against the passage to the autocephalous Church, even though the parish priest tried to convince those present to remain with the patriarchate of Moscow, saying that he would not pass. "But he is young, does not realize how things are and what people want," said Larisa.

The priest is gone, and at the village they are waiting for Kiev to send a new parish priest. The church for prudence has been sealed and no ceremony takes place; the outgoing parish priest refused to make statements. Only the sacristan Mikhail, the only one to vote against, tells of the pressures of the promoters towards the assembly: "It all happened very quickly, within three days ... to take the initiative were the most influential parishioners and richer, who could afford to go around the houses to convince others, had more contacts than everyone else. We, on the contrary, were not very organized ".

Other parishioners, who refused to attend the assembly, were resentful with the group of promoters: "It was a real coup, they took the church without any discussion," said Natalia Petrova. She does not consider legitimate the new autocephalous Church, despite the concession of Tomos from Constantinople: "They did not even want to listen to the parish priest, they just told him to step aside", Natalia complains.

The group of promoters respond to the accusations showing the video of the assembly, in which everyone expressed themselves freely and without pressure in favor of the new Church. In

their view, undue pressure is being exerted by the minority of pro-Russian parishioners. "Russian priests are always trying to scare people, it's their way of doing things, they know that they are losing their power and their churches here," warns Viktor Soroka.

According to Viktor, the four surrounding villages are also deciding to pass under the authority of Epifanyj of Kiev, and soon the respective parish assemblies will take place. The area of Odessa, a large port on the Black Sea immortalized by the famous film Battleship Potemkin, is one of the most affected by the conflict with Russia, but the reality is that the debate is raging in parishes throughout Ukraine.

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