



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on February 22, 2026

Ukrainian Christians Go Underground in Face of Persecution and Church Seizures

Some Ukrainian Christians have been forced to retreat to the “catacombs” to worship because of persecution and church seizures, the [Daily Caller](#) reported Friday.

Furthermore, the embattled Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) is in danger of being shut down under a 2024 law prohibiting churches from having any ties to Russia.

The UOC — which, according to the Daily Caller, “traces its roots to the 17th-century Russian Orthodox Church (ROC)” — claims to have full autonomy from Moscow except for its canonical relationship. (For instance, sacraments performed by the UOC are considered valid in the ROC and vice versa.)

However, wrote the Daily Caller, “Opponents claim the UOC’s divine liturgy often includes Russian propaganda — such as prayers for Patriarch Kirill, head of the ROC, and vocal supporter of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.”

OCU vs. UOC

The Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), which has no Russian connections, benefits enormously from the government’s antipathy toward the UOC. This is not surprising since the OCU was, [at Kyiv’s instigation](#), “artificially constructed” in 2018 from two schismatic Orthodox branches to serve “the political interests of the government,” Metropolitan Feodosii, head of the Cherkasy UOC, told the Daily Caller.

UOC churches are being seized and transferred to the OCU, with priests and parishioners often brutalized in the process, Feodosii and other UOC leaders allege.

The Daily Caller recounted one such incident:

Nearly a dozen UOC parishioners described to the Caller an alleged violent takeover of St. Michael’s Cathedral in Cherkasy in October 2024.

Parishioners [claimed](#) more than 500 men — many wearing masks, camouflage and armed with crowbars and bolt cutters — arrived just after liturgy ended. The men allegedly used tear gas and trapped nearby residents in their homes before parishioners briefly fended them off.

One parishioner showed the Caller bruises still visible on his legs. Another claimed her husband was beaten so badly he could not even talk, and he suffered “many fractures of his bones.” The woman’s youngest child was so traumatized by the event that he went almost a



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whole year only addressing himself as “kitten” instead of his given name, she told the Caller.

Feodosii allegedly suffered burns and a concussion during the fracas and ended up in the hospital.

“Parishioners alleged priests from the OCU stood along the fence laughing with the police as they waited to take over the property,” wrote the Daily Caller.

Underground Churches

Two other UOC churches in Cherkasy were later seized. “Officials said the seizures followed community votes to transfer churches from the UOC to the OCU,” the website noted, “though many UOC members claimed they were never informed of the votes and non-Orthodox residents were chosen to participate.”

The persecution became severe enough that parishioners are now worshipping in the “catacombs,” Feodosii alleged. The Daily Caller was given [candlelight tours](#) of two of these secret churches, one in a basement with no electricity and the other in a subterranean lumber shop. Both lack natural light.

Arresting Developments

Feodosii [told](#) the Daily Caller that, in addition to being injured during the cathedral seizure, he “lost his home, spent over a year under house arrest, and now faces prison — simply for keeping a link to the Moscow Patriarchate on his website.”

Metropolitan Arseniy, leader of the Sviatohirsk Lavra monastery, has also suffered at the government’s hands. His offense: Complaining in a 2023 sermon about government checkpoints in the area that, in his opinion, were intended to ensnare UOC pilgrims who would be arriving for a feast day.

Arseniy was arrested in April 2024 for “dissemination of information on the movement or location of the Armed Forces of Ukraine or other military formations,” his lawyers told the Daily Caller. He has been held without bail and subjected to “degrading and inhumane treatment” including “15-hour daily transfers for hearings in handcuffs without food or rest,” his attorneys alleged.

Penned the Daily Caller:

“The authorities must surely know that we Orthodox of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are Ukrainians. Banning our church brings us no nearer to peace or security. It only sows division,” Arseniy said, adding the church only strives to serve God, rather than any “secular power or politics.”

At least one UOC parishioner concurred, telling the website, “Not a word is being said or told about the politics in our church. The church has nothing to do with politics. All we do is keep to the canons of the church. We worship God.”

But OCU leaders claim their UOC counterparts are passing along Russian propaganda and preparing to welcome invading Russian forces. That Russia stuck up for the UOC even as its own forces were accused of persecuting Christians didn’t help matters. However, UOC leaders noted that Russia had killed more UOC leaders than those of any other denomination.

Faith Lift

Kyiv has not yet banned the UOC outright, but it has certainly taken steps in that direction. Most



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notably, President Volodymyr Zelensky issued a decree last July effectively [revoking](#) the Ukrainian citizenship of Metropolitan Onufriy, head of the UOC. UOC leaders fully expect the entire church to be outlawed soon.

Still, as often happens when Christians are persecuted, many are finding their faith strengthened by their trials.

“I feel that the events that have taken place here have reinforced my faith,” one parishioner told the Daily Caller. “I understand that everything happens, as it is said in the gospel, people who suffer, according to Jesus Christ, will receive God’s kingdom.”

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