News

by Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Lviv, Ukraine — November 29, 2022
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint
Two Ukrainian priests are shown in two separate photos

Father Bohdan Geleta, left, and Father Ivan Levitsky are seen in this undated screen grab. (CNS screen grab/courtesy of Ukrainian Catholic Church)

The Ukrainian Catholic Archdiocese of Donetsk is demanding the release of two priests it said were arrested illegally in the Russian-occupied city of Berdyansk.

In a Nov. 25 statement, it said Fr. Ivan Levitsky, a hieromonk and rector of the Church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos, and Fr. Bohdan Geleta, who works at the church, were detained by Russian troops Nov. 16, and the church was illegally searched the following day. The priests' relatives still do not know why the two men were arrested or where they are now.

"We demand the speedy release from custody and imprisonment of our priests ... as well as ensuring their unhindered legitimate service to the spiritual needs of the faithful ... living in the city of Berdyansk," said the statement from the Eastern archdiocese.

"We ask for maximum dissemination of information in order to release the captured fathers. We appeal to the authorities and all people of goodwill to join the cause of the release of priests, as well as for increased prayer in this intention."

Advertisement

Russian media reported the priests were detained because Russian troops searching the church and rectory found explosives and plans for "subversive" and "partisan" activities directed against the troops. However, the archdiocesan statement noted that the priests already were in custody when the search was conducted, so they "cannot bear any responsibility for the weapons and ammunition allegedly found in (the buildings). This is a clear slander and a false accusation."

"The deliberately fabricated false accusation of possession of weapons and explosives against clerics who had no intention of doing such a thing ... while previously they were not accused of anything, attests to the intention to use further terror against the imprisoned fathers. It also attests that in the cities of southern Ukraine, the Russian administration operates according to the methods of the Bolshevik special services," the statement said.

Earlier in the war, in Melitopol, a 74-year-old Orthodox priest was evicted from his home. In April Russian troops arrested the chairman of the council of the German Protestant community in Berdyansk.