

Churches targeted in Russian-occupied Ukraine

June 13, 2025

Authorities in the Russian-occupied Luhansk region of Ukraine raided an unregistered Baptist church during a Pentecost Sunday worship service, an Oslo-based news service focused on international human rights and religious freedom reported.

[Forum 18](#) reported police and a deputy prosecutor raided the Council of Churches Baptist congregation in Krasnodon—also known as Sorokyne—on June 8. Officials took a copy of every religious publication they could find and photographed all the rooms in the church building.

When the Krasnodon police duty officer was asked to explain why law enforcement officers raided the church, [Forum 18 reported](#) the officer simply replied, “We can’t.”

However, the news service noted, Pastor Vladimir Rytikov said: “The main issue is the registration of the church. I explained that for a number of reasons, we do not register. One of the reasons is the duty of the pastor to report to authorities about the life of church members and about the service of the church, and this is betrayal.”

Rytikov was jailed by Soviet authorities from 1979 to 1982 for his involvement in a Christian summer camp for children.

Religious freedom violated in Russian-

occupied Ukraine

The June 8 raid is part of a larger campaign to crack down on unregistered churches and enforce “anti-missionary” laws in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine.

Police raided the Council of Churches Baptist congregation in Luhansk’s Artyomovsky District on May 30.

On May 23, the pastor of another unregistered Council of Churches Baptist congregation in Donetsk was fined for alleged missionary activity. Pastor Vladimir Rudomyotkin was fined several days’ average wage, Forum 18 reported.

Two days earlier, the Budennovsk Inter-District Court in Donetsk similarly punished the city’s Roman Catholic parish.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has pointed to extensive violations of religious freedom related to the issue of registration in Russian-occupied Ukraine.

“Upon registration, religious communities must adhere to Russian law, which prohibits certain forms of religious activities and speech,” the [commission reported](#).

“In Donetsk, Russian soldiers have searched churches, seized equipment and church documents, and removed religious literature deemed ‘extremist.’”



Russian troops destroyed the library of Tavriski Christian Institute in Kherson, Ukraine. However, the school is committed to continuing its mission. (Courtesy Photo)

Russian authorities also have [targeted religious leaders and destroyed religious sites](#) in occupied areas of Ukraine, often killing or injuring people sheltering or worshipping there.

Since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, at least [500 houses of worship](#) and religious sites have been damaged or destroyed.

In its [most recent annual report](#), the commission recommended the U.S. Department of State re-designate Russia as a Country of Particular Concern for its systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom.