

Russian Church Urges Morally Sound TV for Convicts

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Inmates in Russia's prisons, who face problems including overcrowding, disease and violence, also watch too much trashy television, said the country's most powerful religious leader.

Inmates watch too many shows that romanticize crime and would benefit from a cable channel with morally uplifting and patriotic programming, Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill said Friday, Russian news agencies reported.

"Why not think about creating a cable television system for detention facilities and fill the system with remarkable works of film and television?" state-run RIA-Novosti quoted Kirill as saying.

He told a church council on culture that it would help instil inmates with "a different system of values and life priorities," RIA-Novosti reported.

Young Russian inmates should be exposed to "the romance of honest labor and valiant service to the homeland," he said.

Russia has one of the world's largest per capita prison populations, at 628 prisoners per 100,000 residents, and a total of 864,000 inmates in the nation of 142 million as of Jan. 2010.

Rates of HIV, tuberculosis, syphilis and mental disorders are high in often crowded, unsanitary or poorly managed facilities for convicts and pretrial detention centers.

The Russian Orthodox Church has enjoyed a strong revival since the demise of the officially atheist Soviet Union and has vocal support from Russia's political leaders despite the country's secular Constitution.

Rights groups and members of other faiths have expressed concern about the church's growing clout and close ties with the state.

Kirill has sought to attract more young people to the Orthodox Church since he was chosen as its leader last year. The church unveiled its own channel on YouTube in October.

While the majority of Russians come from Russian Orthodox backgrounds, relatively few are regular churchgoers.

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