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# Church Allows Some Clergy to Run for Office

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Russian Orthodox clergy will be eligible to run for elections, though in "exceptional cases" only and without joining a political party, the council of bishops ruled late Wednesday.

Clergy members can run for office when there is a need "to confront forces, including schismatic ones and those from other confessions, who seek to use electoral power to fight the Orthodox Church," the bishops said in a statement.

The Holy Synod will grant its approval to clerics looking to participate in elections of any level on a case-to-case basis, the statement said.

Laymen not working in church institutions are free to run for office without any restrictions, while those employed by the church should obtain permission of a local bishop.

The document on the church's policy on elections was approved by bishops on the first day of

the council, which runs in Moscow from Wednesday to Friday.

President Dmitry Medvedev met on Thursday with representatives of the council in the Kremlin, where he presented the church's head, Patriarch Kirill, with a state award.

He called on the church to help strengthen connections with Russian diasporas abroad.

Kirill said the church is also building a dialog with other confessions, seeking to help "preserve unity" of the country and avoid ethnic conflicts such as December's riots in downtown Moscow, staged by ultranationalists.

Medvedev also said 240 positions for priests were established in the army in accordance with his own decree last year. Kirill said Wednesday that the church started recruiting priests who will work at military headquarters.

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