The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Patriarch Plants Church Near FSB School

By Alexander Bratersky

July 31, 2012



Patriarch Kirill dressing for Tuesday's dedication of the future site of the Iverskaya Mother of God Icon Church. **Ksenia Barakovskaya**

Highlighting vibrant ties between the Russian Orthodox Church and the intelligence community, Patriarch Kirill oversaw the laying of the cornerstone for a new church at a FSB academy on Tuesday.

The brick Iverskaya Mother of God Icon Church will stand near the main building of the Federal Security Service Academy on 70 Michurinsky Prospekt near the Universitet metro in western Moscow and serve professors and FSB cadets.

The timing of the cornerstone-laying ceremony and the mingling of Patriarch Kirill with senior FSB officials sent a signal of support for the church, which has come under attack from the educated community recently for supporting felony charges against the Pussy Riot band. Three rockers went on trial this week for singing an anti-Putin song in Christ the Savior Cathedral in February.

Viktor Ostroukhov, head of the Federal Security Service Academy, said at Tuesday's ceremony that intelligence officers are "concerned" by attacks on the "Christian way of life."

"Those attacks are aimed at young people," Ostroukhov said, adding that his "armed" officers stand united with the Russian Orthodox Church.

While the Communist regime denounced religion and prosecuted priests in Soviet times, the relationship between the church and security services has flourished after the Soviet collapse. "The relationship between the church and FSB is very friendly, and they cooperate closely with each other," said Andrei Soldatov, who tracks the FSB with the Agentura.ru think tank.

He said ties were especially strengthened in 2000 when the Federal Border Service, which answers to the FSB, deported a number of Catholic priests on suspicion of spying.

Observers said at that time that the expulsions were carried out on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church, which was worried about proselytizing by the Roman Catholic Church.

An Orthodox dissident priest and member of the Moscow Helsinki Group, Father Gleb Yakunin said by telephone that his studies of declassified KGB archives indicated that Kirill might have had ties to the KGB while working for the Russian Orthodox Church in the West in the 1980s.

Similar accusations of KGB links were made about Kirill's predecessor, Patriarch Alexey II, who died in 2008.

Speaking at Tuesday's ceremony, Patriarch Kirill said the new church would also be open to the public and serve as a replacement for neighborhood churches destroyed in Soviet times.

"There is a lack of churches in the city," he said. "When you have one church for 100,000 people, it is hard to perform worship services."

The Russian Orthodox Church earlier unveiled plans to build 200 new churches in Moscow, and it has created a fund to support the program. Some critics say the money could be put to better use repairing existing churches.

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