

Orthodox Church Forms New Caucasus Eparchy

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The Orthodox Church has formed a new entity covering the predominantly Muslim North Caucasus regions of Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan.

The Makhachkala Eparchy was set up by the Holy Synod, the church's supreme governing body, church spokesman Vladimir Legoida said late Wednesday, after the two-day session ended, Interfax reported.

The new eparchy, which will be cut out from the existing Vladikavkaz Eparchy, comprises the country's most unstable regions and will pose a challenge to the church, an analyst said.

Dagestan and Ingushetia have been at the epicenter of a violent insurgency by Islamic extremists. Chechnya has been relatively quieter but has also seen attacks by suicide bombers recently.

It will be headed by Bishop Varlaam, who hitherto headed a monastery in Murom, a city east of Moscow.

The move is consistent with the policy of Patriarch Kirill of bringing the church's territorial makeup closer to the country's political divisions, said Roman Lunkin, an expert with the European Center of the Academy of Sciences.

Lunkin added that moving bishops into traditionally Muslim regions also poses risks. "Now it will be easier to accuse the church of proselytism," he said.

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