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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Church Official Fired After Labeling Single Mothers With Derogatory Term

By The Moscow Times

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An Orthodox Church branch has fired its chief missionary over his recent proposal to use a common Russian expletive to denounce single mothers, the church said in a statement.

The Tomsk diocesan council has ruled unanimously that the "rudeness, tactlessness and insults" of Maxim Stepanenko's remarks were "unacceptable" in its missionaries' work, the diocese said in a statement Tuesday.

Stepanenko was dismissed as chief missionary, but will continue working as a rank-and-file employee, the statement said.

The diocesan council also ruled that its missionary department needed to be run by a member of the clergy and appointed priest Alexy Samsonov to replace Stepanenko.

In an online article earlier this month, Stepanenko called for bringing a vulgar term

into mainstream use to brand women who have babies without being married or live with their partners without having had a proper wedding.

The term — which can be translated as "harlot" — is commonly used by Russian speakers as an all-purpose irate interjection. A law signed by President Vladimir Putin last spring bans the Russian media from using the word in print.

In his article, which appeared briefly on a website run by the diocese before it was removed, Stepanenko justified his use of the word by saying that it is cognate with an archaic word for "deception" or "adultery" that appears in a Church Slavonic translation of the New Testament.

But some Russian media were quick to point out that a Church Slavonic translation that is commonly used during services generally favors another, more agreeable and modern-sounding, synonym.

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