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Orthodox Priest Suspended for Praying With Members of Kiev Patriarchate

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Vitaliy Eismont, a priest from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, suspended for praying with members of Kiev patriarchate.

The Moscow-loyal Orthodox Church in Ukraine has suspended a priest after he participated in a prayer service for peace in the country alongside priests from the rival Kiev-based Orthodox Church, a news report said.

Vitaliy Eismont, a priest from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, said that shortly after last week's service with representatives of the Kiev Patriarchate he received a letter from his diocese administration, banning him from conducting religious services, Ukraine's TSN reported Thursday.

The letter said the suspension was for participating "in a 'divine service' with schismatics," Eismont was quoted as saying.

"I just feel deceived by my church," he told TSN. "I wanted the best — for us to be united, be one people, for our church to be Ukrainian and stop betraying its people."

Head of Ukraine's Moscow-loyal church Metropolitan Vissarion said the priest was suspended for his general lack of obedience, TSN reported.

"People did not want him anywhere, he was stirring trouble," Vissarion told TSN. "We had been transferring him from one parish to the next."

Vissarion said Eismont would have to repent to be reinstated, while church spokesman Heorhiy Kovalenko added the priest may appeal the suspension, TSN reported.

The Kiev-based church split from the Moscow-loyal denomination two decades ago, with tensions between the rival churches increasing after Russia's annexation of Crimea in March and amid ongoing clashes in eastern Ukraine between pro-Moscow separatists and government forces.

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