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# Russian Priest Accused of Killing Woman When Driving Drunk

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Ivan Petunov

The Russian Orthodox Church said it was suspending a priest accused of killing a woman in a drunk-driving accident Tuesday in northern Russia.

The priest, Ivan Petunov, 35, is accused of ramming his Skoda Fabia into a woman, aged 53 or 54, as she was walking along a pedestrian crossing in the city of Petrozavodsk in Russia's republic of Karelia early Tuesday morning, the church's regional branch said in a statement. The woman died at the scene.

"The actions of the drivers cost the life of an innocent woman, whose family has suffered an irreparable loss," the statement said. "Our church shares their grief and praised for the repose of her soul. If it is confirmed that the priest was indeed driving while intoxicated, there can be no moral justification for this."

Video footage captured by a surveillance camera and posted online, showed a car running through a pedestrian crossing at a high speed, hitting a woman, and then continuing across a traffic circle until being slowed by a pile-up of snow before eventually stopping in the middle of a rotary.

Petunov has been suspended from church duties until the investigation is complete, the statement said, adding the Karelia branch of the church would seek to disrobe him should he be found guilty.

The priest has acknowledged his involvement in the accident, telling journalists at the scene he "was in a hurry," the Gazeta.ru news portal reported.

Another video, captured by the dashboard camera of a car behind, showed a Skoda Fabia swerving erratically as it tried to pass other cars, and side-slamming an SUV. The Skoda Fabia slowed down briefly, and then sped up again, rushing into the traffic circle.

Another Karelia priest, Konstantin Savander, said Petunov was well-liked by his parishioners, and expressed concerns that Petunov might be driven by guilt to "do something to himself," Gazeta.ru reported.

Police released Petunov after he signed a pledge to remain at his home address, Lenta.ru news portal reported. If convicted, he faces up to seven years in prison, the report said.

Russia has seen a number of deadly road accidents caused by intoxicated Orthodox priests in recent years.

In one of the most notorious cases, hieromonk Ilya was found guilty of hitting a road-construction crew with his Mercedes Gelandewagen while going 140 kilometers per hour on Moscow's Kutuzovsky Prospekt in 2012, killing two of the men, Gazeta.ru reported.

He was sentenced to three years in prison, the report said.

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