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Russian Officials Pray for World Cup Stadium Completion

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Desperate officials in St. Petersburg have turned to the power of prayer in a bid to see the city's World Cup stadium completed on schedule.

Twenty priests gathered in the city's Zenit Arena to hold a special service for the arena's timely completion.

"It was the prayer for the successful completion of the stadium," said diocese spokesperson Natalya Radomanova. "This is an unofficial event, but there's no question that the unfinished stadium has been blessed," she said.

The service was held on the orders of St. Petersburg Governor Georgy Poltavchenko, t
he
Fontanka news website reported. It was
attended by the Legislative Assembly

Speaker
Vyacheslav Makarov, St. Petersburg
Vice
Governor Igor Albin, and 50 construction
workers, Fontanka
reported.

The 69,000 capacity Zenit Arena in St. Petersburg has been under construction since 2007 and its current budget of 39.2 billion rubles ($605 million) is over five times original estimates, TASS reported.

The stadium must be operational before the end of the year in order to host matches at next summer's Confederations Cup, a warm-up tournament for the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

Work on the project has been consistently behind schedule, with the head of the stadium's building contractor, Vadim Alexandrov, even inviting local residents and the Russian military to join in the project.

Russia's paratroopers declined the offer, telling reporters that "paratroopers have no time for construction work. Not even of stadiums."

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