The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Church Issues Ultimatum to Virus-Denying Priest Over Monastery Capture

June 18, 2020



Religious authorities barred Father Sergei from preaching in April for refusing to follow health guidelines aimed at stopping the spread of coronavirus. **Donat Sorokin / TASS**

An Orthodox diocese in central Russia has warned an ultraconservative priest who denies the existence of the coronavirus to give up his siege of the women's monastery where he is a spiritual leader.

Father Sergei was reported to have enlisted Cossack fighters as guards — an assertion that they deny — after capturing the Sredneuralsk women's monastery this week. Religious authorities barred Father Sergei from preaching in April for refusing to follow health guidelines aimed at stopping the spread of coronavirus.

Related article: Coronavirus-Denying Russian Priest Captures Church With Cossack Fighters

The Yekaterinburg diocese said in a statement Wednesday that Father Sergei's preaching was still subject to the decision of an ecclesiastical court. During its first session this week, Father Sergei accused Orthodox Church leader Patriarch Kirill of betraying the faith.

“Church sacraments will be invalid and graceless should Father Sergei (Romanov) perform them in a state of being banned from religious rites,” the diocese's statement said.

The diocese noted that Father Sergei continues to defy orders to perform ascetic prayers in a neighboring male monastery. Mother Superior Varvara and other abbesses voluntarily left the Sredneuralsk monastery “to avoid unnecessary infighting,” it added.

The diocese gave Father Sergei until the next ecclesiastical court date on June 26 to “rectify and repent” the situation.

“I’m not going anywhere... they’ll have to chase me out with police and the National Guard,” Father Sergei had said earlier Wednesday.

The Orenburg Cossack Army has meanwhile denied reports that its official members have been posted around the monastery’s perimeter to guard the site.

“The media reports of Cossacks supporting Father Sergei (Romanov) are disinformation,” it wrote on its social media page.

Father Sergei is known as the former confessor of several public figures including Russian lawmaker and former Crimean prosecutor Natalia Poklonskaya. Poklonskaya denied that he is her current confessor and declined to comment on the incident further.

A state-run media correspondent reported witnessing around 100 worshippers at Father Sergei’s service Wednesday, including star hockey player Pavel Datsyuk.

Father Sergei, a former policeman, changed his secular name to Nikolai Romanov in honor of Russia’s last emperor and previously spent 13 years in prison for murder.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/06/18/russian-church-issues-ultimatum-to-virus-denying-priest-over-monastery-capture-a70613