

# Defrocked Coronavirus-Denying Priest Tells Putin to Step Down

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Father Sergei was defrocked earlier this month over his refusal to follow coronavirus-related restrictions.  
**Donat Sorokin / TASS**

An ultraconservative, coronavirus-denying priest who was defrocked after capturing a convent in central Russia has called on President Vladimir Putin to give up his powers or face a “spiritual war.”

Father Sergei was found guilty of breaking his monastic vows by an ecclesiastical court earlier in July. He seized the Sredneuralsk women’s monastery near Yekaterinburg after religious authorities barred him from preaching in April for refusing to follow coronavirus health guidelines, [calling](#) the restrictions a “satanic plot.”

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“I offer at an international level that you, Russian President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin,

transfer powers to me,” Father Sergei [said](#) in his latest address.

“Three days and I’ll restore order in Russia,” he said in a video published on his spokesman’s YouTube channel Sunday.

“Otherwise, I’ll declare a full-scale spiritual war against you personally, as well as the apostate Patriarch Kirill Gundyayev and the Chabad Berel Lazar, who rules Russia,” he said, referring to the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, who was born Vladimir Gundyayev, and Russia’s chief rabbi Berel Lazar.

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

Before being defrocked he was a prominent but controversial figure in the Orthodox Church, serving as the confessor of sports stars and politicians including Russian lawmaker and former Crimean prosecutor Natalia Poklonskaya.

A BBC Russia report published earlier this month [described](#) psychologically abusive treatment toward children living in the monastery.

Father Sergei is at least the second high-profile religious figure to seek Putin’s ouster. The first, Siberian shaman Alexander Gabyshev, has been detained during multiple attempts to trek to Moscow and ordered to undergo a psychiatric evaluation.

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