

Anti-War Russian Priest Seeks Asylum in U.S.

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Archpriest Fedor Shumskikh (L) diak-kuraev.livejournal.com

A Russian priest who opposes the war in Ukraine has fled the country and is now seeking asylum in the United States, according to reports.

Archpriest Theodore Shumskikh traveled to the U.S. with his wife and six children, said Alexei Gorbachev, a journalist with the Voice of America broadcaster's (VOA) Russian service.

"He opposes the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and decided to leave Russia," Gorbachev [wrote](#) in a Facebook post on Sunday.

"He requested political asylum on the Mexican border and arrived in Washington, D.C. just a few days ago," Gorbachev continued.

Gorbachev published a photograph of himself posing with Archpriest Theodore at the St. Nicholas Orthodox Cathedral in Washington. He said the church congregation is overseeing efforts to help the priest and his family resettle.

Patriarch Kirill, the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, has been a vocal supporter of President Vladimir Putin and his order to invade Ukraine in February.

The Russian Orthodox Church [defrocked](#) Archpriest Theodore “for abandoning priestly service” in May, banning him from service until November.

Archpriest Theodore, 49, was born in northeastern Ukraine’s Kharkiv region and served in the Russian army in the early 1990s, according to his archived biography on the website of Smolensky Cathedral in the western Russian city of Belgorod on the border with Ukraine.

Accounts differ on when he and his family fled Russia and arrived in the U.S.

One of Russia’s most prominent theologians, Andrei Kuraev, [said](#) the priest sold his belongings in February and moved to Turkey.

[According](#) to the Belgorod region’s Fonar.tv news website, Archpriest Theodore and his family secretly traveled from Russia to the U.S. in May.

Archpriest Theodore had never publicly spoken out against Russia’s war in Ukraine, Fonar.tv reported, citing Belgorod’s archdiocese.

A fellow priest characterized him, however, as a “rebel,” and the archdiocese said he had a track record of disciplinary actions for his behavior dating back to 2009.

“Father Theodore has unfortunately always disagreed with something or someone and was in no hurry to fix this,” the diocese said.

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