The Moscow Times
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Russian Orthodox Church Holds Nationwide Anti-Abortion Prayer

January 12, 2026



An anti-abortion prayer service at a church in Moscow on Jan. 11, 2025. **moseparh.ru**

The Russian Orthodox Church launched a nationwide prayer service this weekend that urges women against having an abortion, coming amid government efforts to reverse the country's population decline.

On Sunday, churches in at least 15 regions held the newly sanctioned rite, according to the Kommersant business newspaper. The prayer service, approved last month by the Holy Synod, is described as an "admonition for those intending to destroy an infant in the womb."

Some prayer services were accompanied by visual displays from anti-abortion organizations, including fetal models sold by a U.S.-based Christian organization, according to the exiled news outlet Mediazona.

A church in Moscow lit 3,000 candles as a tribute to "children killed by abortion." State Duma lawmaker Tatiana Butskaya attended that service, according to the Telegram news channel Ostorozhno Novosti.

A priest in the Novosibirsk region urged women who have had abortions to “dedicate their lives to praying for forgiveness and assisting abandoned children.”

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The Russian Orthodox Church linked the anti-abortion prayer service to the Feast of the Holy Innocents, which commemorates the Massacre of the Innocents, a story in the Bible that recounts the killing of 14,000 infants in Bethlehem.

The Rybinsk Diocese in the Yaroslavl region said the Russian Orthodox Church mandated the new prayer service be held annually on Jan. 11, according to the Meduza news website.

Abortion in Russia remains legal on request up to the 12th week of pregnancy. However, the debate over restricting abortion access has intensified in recent years as the country confronts a falling birth rate, natural population decline and rising male mortality.

In 2023, the Russian Orthodox Church moved to equate abortion with murder, while its leader, Patriarch Kirill, claimed that talking women out of abortions would solve Russia’s demographic crisis “like a magic wand.”

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