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Putin Awards State Humanitarian Prize to Patriarch Kirill on His 80th Birthday

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President Vladimir Putin on Friday awarded Russia's state prize for achievements in humanitarian work to Russian Orthodox Church head Patriarch Kirill to mark his 80th birthday.

The award carries a monetary prize of 10 million rubles ($121,600) and is normally granted to one recipient per year.

Because Moscow State University rector Viktor Sadovnichy already received the 2026 award, Kirill was granted a second prize by a separate presidential decision, according to the Sotavision outlet. In November, Putin awarded the patriarch another state prize for strengthening the unity of the Russian nation.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Putin called Patriarch Kirill from Tajikistan to congratulate him and planned to meet him in person after returning to Moscow later on Friday evening.

Established in 2005, the humanitarian prize was first awarded to Kirill's predecessor, Patriarch Alexy II. Past recipients include writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn, cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova and former French President Jacques Chirac.

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Born Vladimir Gundyayev, Kirill took monastic vows in 1969 and worked for the Soviet KGB under the code name "Mikhailov" while representing the Russian Orthodox Church in Geneva in the 1970s, Swiss media previously reported, citing declassified police archives.

Although he initially opposed nationalism and welcomed the separation of church and state in the 1990s, Patriarch Kirill has aligned the Russian Orthodox Church closely with the Kremlin since becoming its leader in 2009.

Patriarch Kirill has emerged as a prominent ideological backer of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Patriarch Kirill is under British, Ukrainian, Canadian, Australian, Czech and Estonian sanctions for his vocal support for the invasion.

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