

Why Russian Christians are going to need our prayer

In scenes reminiscent of the book of Esther (4:1-17) leaders of Russia's Baptist Union urged all Christians to pray and fast last week for God's protection on Christians in Russia.

The Russian parliament passed several draconian new measures last week which have the potential to take us right back to the bad days of persecution in the Soviet era. They were passed using the cover of a broad anti-terrorist spectrum – as many unpopular measures frequently are these days.

As you will see from this update from the Latvian based website serious restrictions against the right to practise the Christian faith were passed, along with a huge raft of other changes that are going to make life much more restrictive in Russia. See [Russia's State Duma just approved some of the most repressive laws in post Soviet history](#)

The new laws state that individuals will be required to gain prior state authorisation before even discussing their faith with someone else. (The *Duma* adopted these amendments and the bill was passed by the Council of the Russian Federation before being sent on to Russian President Vladimir Putin for final release).

Under its terms, *any* sharing of the Christian faith – even a casual conversation – requires prior authorisation from the state. This includes something as basic as an emailed invitation for a friend to attend a church. Even in a private home, worship and prayer will only be allowed if there are no unbelievers present. Churches will also be held accountable for the activities of their members. So if, for example, a church member mentions their faith in conversation with a work colleague, not only the church member but also the church itself could be punished, with individuals facing fines of up to 50,000 roubles (£580; USD770; €700).

There are also restrictions on the extent to which churches can have contact with foreigners; for example, any non-Russian citizen attending a church service would be required to have a work visa or face a fine and expulsion from Russia. President Putin has in recent years increasingly emphasised his own membership of, and commitment to, the Russian Orthodox Church. These measures have been passed as part of anti-terrorist legislation to clamp down on any churches other than the Russian Orthodox, support for which is closely tied to Russian nationalism.

Even some [senior members](#) of the Russian Orthodox Church have voiced concerns about the bill.

How these laws are implemented will depend on local authorities. It could in theory lead to a situation similar to that faced by Christians in the Communist era.

Russian Protestants have campaigned against the proposals. Sergei Ryakhovsky, head of the Protestant Churches of Russia, wrote with other evangelical leaders to Putin urging him not to sign the legislation into law, saying that "Yarovaya's Law violates human rights and fundamental liberties with regard to religious freedom".

The Church leaders said: "The obligation on every believer to have a special permit to spread his or her beliefs, as well as hand out religious literature and material outside of places of worship and used structures is not only absurd and offensive, but also creates the basis for mass persecution of believers for violating these provisions."

Their letter continued: "Soviet history shows us how many people of different faiths have been persecuted for spreading the Word of God. This law brings us back to a shameful past."

According to Mission Eurasia president Sergey Rakhuba, a veteran Moscow church leader and planter, the Churches will continue to function underground. He told Christianity Today: "The Great Commission isn't just for a time of freedom." [Russia evangelicals pray, fast and lobby Putin as severe restrictions placed on evangelicals.](#)

See [here](#) for one of several sources for the above information.

Putin and dangers in the Middle East and beyond

President Putin's efforts and ambitions on the world stage are highly interventionist. Here are two examples, which in their own way also point the finger firmly back at the American administration.

[Putin's New World Order](#) and [Putin's War on Terror](#)