

Russia: Restrictions to religious freedom and freedom of expression in practice

Construction of Pentecostal church hits snag: Application for a liturgical building rejected in Perm

By Dmitry Vladimirov

Russia Religion News (19.02.2018) / Gulliver (13.02.2018) – <http://bit.ly/2Ca07EL> – On 12 February, the Commission for Land Use and Construction rejected an application of the religious organization of the Missionary Center of Christians of Evangelical Faith “Youth with a Mission” for granting permission in a Zh-2 zone (medium-story residential construction) for the use of “liturgical buildings and structures” on a parcel of 1,900 square meters at the address 6 Superfosfatnaia St. in Ordzhonikidze district.

Moreover this was not the first time this happened: in late December 2017 members of the commission responded coolly to the idea of any religious construction in the middle of a planned residential district, and the question was postponed. Now the commission completely refused to satisfy the application.

As was explained at the session, previously a "Friendship" children's club was located here and the evangelicals acquired the territory and the remaining dilapidated (this was especially noted at the session-ed.) building in 2007.

The general opinion at the session was that this organization is a "dark horse," which had not provided any clear explanations of what would be built there in the event of a positive decision.

The result was that a majority of members declared that they opposed an "exotic" use of the territory within a residential district.

The chairman of the commission, a deputy head of the city administration, Viktor Ageev, advised the applicant to first obtain the support of the local population, and if this happens then theoretically it would be possible to return to the question. (tr. by PDS, posted 15 February 2018)

Norwegian Jehovah's Witnesses try to prevent confiscation of house of worship

Russia Religion News (13.02.2018) / SOVA Center – <http://bit.ly/2ok8EM1> – On 13 February it became known that a Norwegian organization of Jehovah's Witnesses turned to the city court of Petrozavodsk. The "Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of the Kingdom of Norway" had acquired a building on

Pervomaisk Prospect in 1998 and donated it in 2007 to Russian Jehovah's Witnesses, who transferred it to Finnish fellow believers in 2017.

The Norwegian organization insists that if the donation agreement of 2017 were to be ruled invalid, then the donation agreement of 1998 (sic-2007?) also should be found to be invalid, and that means that the Norwegian organization again becomes the owner of the building. The court admitted the "Watchtower Bible and Tract Society" of Norway to participation in the trial in the capacity of a third person. (tr. by PDS, posted 13 February 2018)

Prosecutions for anti-religious statements

Sova Center (13.02.2018) – <http://bit.ly/2EGqLH4> – In mid-January, the magistrate court in Sochi dismissed the criminal case against Viktor Nochevnov, previously convicted under Article 148 part 1 of the Criminal Code (insulting the feelings of believers) due to the statute of limitations. Nochevnov was sentenced to a fine of 50 thousand rubles in August 2017, but, in October, the district court annulled the verdict and sent the case for a new trial. The Sochi resident faced charges for sharing a series of cartoon images of Jesus Christ on a social network. We opposed the criminal prosecution against Nochevnov. In our opinion, the formula "insulting the feelings of believers", which has no legal meaning, should be removed from the Criminal Code altogether.

We learned in late January that, back in September 2017,

musician Daniil Sukachyov of Novgorod was fined 30 thousand rubles under Article 5.26 part 2 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (desecration of religious objects), and the district court confirmed the relevant decision of the magistrate in November. Sukachyov published on VKontakte a video set to the song of the Polish black metal band Batushka [Father], which used video of Orthodox worship, edited with addition of various superimposed effects (flames, smoke, etc.). We view the prosecution of the Novgorod resident as inappropriate – he did not create a video, but only posted it on the social network page; in addition, no actual religious objects were desecrated even in the process of creating the video.

82% of Russians consider unacceptable jokes about the Church

Interfax (19.02.2018) – <http://bit.ly/2FdVKXT> – Overwhelming majority of Russians (82%) believe it unacceptable to make jokes about the Church no matter what are the circumstances, the VTsIOM (the Russian Public Opinion Research Center) reports.

The poll showed that Russians also do not accept jokes about Russian history, the USSR, Russian Empire (70%), national peculiarities and traditions of various peoples (65%), Russian historical personalities who have passed away (64%), Russian military forces (62%).

Most part of respondents believe it acceptable to laugh at Russia's economic and social problems (53%) and acting authorities in general (54%).

The poll was held on February 9-10 among 2000 respondents.