

RUSSIA: Absurd application of anti-evangelism law

Protestant pastor fined because his congregation fed the hungry

by Roman Lunkin

Russia Religion News (31.05.2018)/ [Religiia i pravo, 29 May 2018](#) (29.06.2018)

– <https://www2.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/180529f.html> – On 23 May 2018, a magistrate judge of the legal district No. 1 of the city of Slavgorod in Altai territory fined a pastor of the “Cornerstone” religious group of Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals), Denis Chuprov, 5,000 rubles on the basis of part 4 of article 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Violations of Law of the RF, for illegal missionary activity. The court’s ruling is being appealed.

In and of itself, the “crime” consisted of the fact that back on 10 March 2018, two women from a congregation of Pentecostals conducted an action “Feed a neighbor” on the main street of Slavgorod, Lenin St. This kind of action is conducted for all needy persons in the center of the city every Saturday and it enjoys success. At the same time, these two believers even had permission for conducting missionary activity from the religious group. On the table of the members of the protestant congregation lay a New Testament and a Psalter, without identifying labels, but a religious group may distribute literature without them; this requirement pertains only to a religious organization.

One of those arrested by the police noted: "People came up and we fed them and talked about the Lord. The literature was lying on the tables. There were not many people and I tried to give them literature, but nobody took it. The Lord's word is that people be filled up. The Lord sent us so that we will feed the hungry. What I have myself learned about the Lord I also told people. In order to tell people we talked with them about this."

Meanwhile, the action in and of itself did not presuppose distribution of literature; the New Testament simply lay on the table for all who wanted it but nobody took it. People came to eat.

Pastor Denis Chuprov was not at this action, although the court considered him to be guilty of illegal missionary activity. The chain of events and deductions leading to the charges against the pastor of the protestant congregation fully comport with the general absurd, and sometimes even ugly, practice of the application of the Yarovaya Law throughout the country.

First of all, according to some reports, a law enforcement agent walked past the tables of the "Feed a neighbor" action and considered the presence of the believers in the public space to be inappropriate and called the police. The police did not compose a report on the spot and originally no blame of the pastor was indicated, since he himself was absent.

The magistrate judge decided that since the religious group of Pentecostals belongs to the "Church of Faith" Association of

Christians of Evangelical Faith (this was indicated in the group's notification submitted to agencies of justice) then the identifying label of the "Church of Faith" organization should be in the New Testament. The fact that the action was conducted in the name of a group was not taken into account by the judge.

The proof of missionary activity was that members of the congregation disseminated religious belief, to wit, "they talked about God," although in and of itself this is not religious belief, and the essence of the believers' initiative consisted in support for the needy.

Finally, the most amazing thing is that according to the law on freedom of conscience, a clergyman may be engaged in missionary activity without any permission. But the pastor still was fined for the action at which he was not present. The situation in Slavgorod of Altai territory shows that something inexplicable forces representatives of authority to react to believers as a potential danger: it is better for a church that goes outside to be punished prophylactically. (tr. by PDS, posted 3 June 2018)

HRWF additional information

Putin is in Austria this Tuesday: See some press coverage of FOREF-HRWF press release

https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20180604_OTS0032/praesident-putins-besuch-in-oesterreich

<https://www.presstext.com/news/20180604010>

<http://www.tt.com/home/14436256-91/putin-in-wien-kritik-von-neos-und-menschenrechtsorganisationen.csp>

<https://diepresse.com/home/ausland/aussenpolitik/5440887/Scharfe-Kritik-an-PutinBesuch>

https://www.wienerzeitung.at/nachrichten/oesterreich/politik/968815_Kritik-an-Putin-Visite.html

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