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Council of Churches Baptist communities banned

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Council of Churches Baptists continue to meet for worship outside their church building in Kurganinsk in Krasnodar Region, three months after bailiffs sealed it. They were enforcing a September 2024 court order prohibiting the activities of the 600-strong community unless it submitted notification of its existence. Courts have banned several other Council of Churches congregations, with prosecutors seeking more. Neither Krasnodar Regional Prosecutor's Office nor Kurganinsk District Court responded to Forum 18 as to why they had been involved in prohibiting the church's activities.

Courts in Russia have prohibited the activities of several Council of Churches Baptist communities because of their refusal to seek any form of state registration. Prosecutors are seeking similar bans on at least another three, Forum 18 has found. Once a court ruling enters legal force, church leaders are at risk of fines if they continue to conduct worship services, and bailiffs may seal church buildings, preventing access by congregations.

One community, in Kurganinsk in Krasnodar Region, has been regularly meeting for worship outside its building over three months since officials sealed it in May. Their appeal to the Supreme Court in Moscow is due to be heard on 28 August (see below).

"Last Sunday I witnessed church members old and young praying on their knees, right on the pavement," a Baptist noted in late July. "The brothers have one heart and one spirit. The church defends its independence from the state" (see below).

Neither Krasnodar Regional Prosecutor's Office nor Kurganinsk District Court responded to Forum 18 as to why they had been involved in prohibiting the church's activities (see below).

The number of such prohibitions – imposed specifically for failing to notify Justice Ministry authorities of the beginning of a religious group's activities – has risen noticeably in recent years, a lawyer familiar with the situation confirmed to Forum 18. So far in 2024-25, five churches have either already been banned or are facing lawsuits. In 2023 there appear to have been no such cases, with two in 2022 and one in 2021.

Despite prosecutors' claims of protecting public order and state security by seeking bans on their activities, these communities do not engage in any violent or disruptive actions or violations of others' human rights.

The recent trend of prohibiting Council of Churches Baptists' activities appears to be particularly pronounced in the southern Krasnodar Region, with four of the known lawsuits taking place there. There have been others in each of the Mari El Republic and Ulyanovsk Region in central Russia, the Far Eastern Amur Region, and Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug in Western Siberia.

Exactly why Krasnodar Region should be seeing so many bans is unclear. It is likely partly linked to the high number of administrative prosecutions in the Region for "unlawful missionary activity", which usually form part of the evidence in such lawsuits.

Why this practice appears to have accelerated recently is "difficult to say", the lawyer added, but "In my opinion, the state is trying to give some legal status to communities in this way, so that it will be easier to control their activities".

"Citizens have the right to practice religion together without creating religious associations. If citizens say that they have not created any group, then this is their legal right", Sergey Chugunov, another lawyer who has worked on such cases, wrote on his Telegram channel. "To prove the opposite, criteria prescribed by law are needed." Without such criteria, bans on individuals for meeting to exercise freedom of religion or belief "contradict the current law and the Constitution" (see below).

"The problem is not being solved deliberately," Chugunov believes. "Because if criteria for creating religious groups are prescribed [as the Religion Law currently does not], this will clearly distinguish this right from the right to gather without creating associations." He blames the "regulatory authorities", not believers, for "emerging tensions" in state-religious relations. "Believers are within their rights" (see below).

So far, Council of Churches Baptists appear to be the only religious community affected by this trend, lawyers have told Forum 18. Some other communities also worship without either registering as religious organisations or submitting notification of the creation of a religious

group. This means that it is technically possible that they too may be vulnerable to lawsuits. These may include some other Protestants and some Muslims (for example, small rural congregations, or students or migrant workers who worship together informally in hostels or workplaces).

Refusal to accept state control

Refusal to register their communities or otherwise accept state regulation has been a key element of Council of Churches Baptists' identity since their emergence in the Soviet Union in the 1960s.

This came about as the result of division between those Soviet Baptists who operated within the state-approved Baptist Union - abiding by the Khrushchev government's restrictions on religious life (including on the content of sermons, the appointment of pastors, and the involvement of children in religious communities) - and those who actively rejected these restrictions and established their own Council, worshipping and teaching underground.

Since the collapse of the USSR, Council of Churches Baptists have met openly, but in private homes or prayer houses built on private land. They do not seek state permission to exercise their freedom of religion or belief, as is [their right under international human rights law](#).

Council of Churches Baptists argue that the 1997 Religion Law and the Russian Constitution – as well as Russia's international human rights obligations - permit them to meet for worship without state involvement.

Council of Churches Baptists now meet in about 2,500 congregations, Novaya Gazeta Europe [noted on 12 August 2025](#).

Future threat to worship in residential property?

On 16 June 2025, a group of State Duma deputies [introduced a bill](#) which, if passed, would outlaw public worship services and religious rites and ceremonies on residential premises and in the non-residential parts of blocks of flats.

The Duma is likely to consider the bill in its autumn session, which begins in September, according to its website.

"These amendments would affect the absolute majority of prayer rooms of the [Council of Churches Baptists]", Novaya Gazeta Europe observed on 12 August.

How are communities banned?

The procedure of banning a community's activities may begin with an inspection by prosecutor's office officials, usually accompanied by police or Federal Security Service (FSB) personnel, carried out to check "compliance with legislation on freedom of conscience and religious associations", in some cases also anti-extremism legislation and fire safety.

In addition, prosecutors may summon pastors for "conversations" about why they have not submitted notification of the beginning of their religious groups' activities.

(These actions may derive from FSB or police surveillance or internet monitoring, or an earlier administrative prosecution of a church leader or member for "unlawful missionary activity". Missionary-related prosecutions may also follow inspections.)

Prosecutors then lodge an administrative or civil lawsuit at a district court "in the interests of an undefined circle of persons". Prosecutors request that the judge prohibit the activities of the church "until violations are eliminated", i.e. until the community submits the required notification (which, on principle, Council of Churches Baptists will not do).

Once a court ruling enters legal force (after one month or upon an unsuccessful appeal), it is subject to enforcement by local bailiffs. If they believe a church is continuing to operate, they may issue a fine to the pastor. Ultimately, they may seal the church's building to prevent its use for worship.

"There is no way to circumvent a court ban, otherwise that will also be punishable by law," the lawyer familiar with such cases explained to Forum 18. Court decisions explicitly prohibit a community's activities not only at the address they habitually use, but also "on the territory of" the town or district. This means that they cannot simply move to different premises.

One district court has stated to Forum 18 that a church would be permitted to resume its activities if it submitted the required notification. It appears, however, that no Council of Churches Baptist community has done this.

(Bailiffs ended enforcement proceedings against the Baptist community in Ulyanovsk, whose activities a court prohibited in 2022, on 27 March 2024, the Council of Churches Intercession Department announced on 4 April 2024. According to the resolution document, seen by Forum 18, this was done on the grounds of "actual fulfilment of requirements". The Intercession Department confirmed to Forum 18, however, that Baptists in Ulyanovsk did not submit notification, and they are unsure why

proceedings against them were brought to an end.)

Legal context

A 2015 amendment to the Religion Law required all unregistered religious associations to notify the authorities (usually regional branches of the Justice Ministry) of their existence and activities. This includes providing the names and addresses of all their members, and addresses where any meeting takes place.

Originally, leaders of religious groups – which are not legal entities – only had to submit such notification once every three years. In 2021, however, further amendments to the Religion Law introduced a requirement [to submit notification every year](#), containing the same information as was previously only required at the beginning of a group's existence.

Failure to notify does not constitute a specific offence, although it can be prosecuted under Administrative Code Article 19.5 ("Failure to comply with a legal order (resolution, submission, decision) of a body (official) exercising state supervision (control)". Legislators in Bashkortostan proposed amendments to the federal Religion Law in 2016, which would have a) clarified the requirement for religious groups to submit notification, and b) introduced fines for non-compliance. The State Duma eventually rejected this on 8 February 2023.

On 27 December 2016, the Plenum of the Supreme Court issued a resolution [partially clarifying the process](#) of prohibiting a religious group's activities, but still leaving much to the discretion of both prosecutors and judges.

According to Point 5, if a group leader has not submitted notification, "the prosecutor has the right to file an administrative claim to prohibit the activities of such a religious association in court". Point 24 states that religious groups' activities may be prohibited on the same grounds that registered religious organisations may be liquidated, ie. "implementation .. of activities prohibited by law, or in violation of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, or with other repeated or gross violations of the law or other legal acts", but also, crucially, that "Based on the specifics of the creation and legal status of a religious group, as enshrined in the Law on Freedom of Conscience, failure to submit notification of the commencement of its activities cannot in itself be grounds for prohibiting the activities of such a group".

Point 26 of the resolution acknowledges that "the law does not establish a list of gross violations", and therefore it is up to the courts to "assess whether a violation of the law committed by a citizens' association is gross and entails liquidation or prohibition of activities" (gross violations may include: "actions aimed at denying fundamental democratic principles,

rights or freedoms recognised by the Constitution of the Russian Federation, generally recognised principles and norms of international law, international treaties of the Russian Federation, federal laws and other regulatory legal acts, at promoting war or inciting national, racial or religious hatred, calls for discrimination, hostility or violence" or actions which present "a real threat or has caused harm to the life [or] health of citizens, the environment, public order and safety, property, legitimate economic interests of individuals and (or) legal entities, society and the state".

Council of Churches Baptists argue that they are individual citizens gathering to worship together as is their constitutional right, without the establishment of any formal association. Prosecutors argue that what they do – meeting regularly, performing "religious rites and ceremonies", sometimes sharing their faith with others – means that they constitute a religious group as defined by the Religion Law. Prosecutors try to show this in court by reference, for instance, to numbers gathering at a particular location on a particular day, collective prayer and hymn singing, and administrative convictions for "unlawful missionary activity".

The Religion Law does not set out a specific process for the creation of a religious group. After a court [banned their community's activities](#) because they had not submitted notification and subsequently carried out "unlawful missionary activity", Council of Churches Baptists in Anapa appealed to the Constitutional Court to clarify this.

The Constitutional Court [refused to consider the appeal](#), but stated in its ruling on 29 September 2022 that "the implementation by citizens (foreign citizens, stateless persons) of missionary activity on behalf of a religious group, in turn testifies to the creation of such a group, the legal existence of which presupposes notification of the beginning of its activity".

"Therefore, any joint confession can still be interpreted by law enforcement as the creation of a religious group that has not notified [the Justice Ministry] of its activities", the Baptists' lawyer Sergey Chugunov [commented on his Telegram channel](#) after the ruling on 3 November 2022. "In my opinion, such an approach can only mean that the problem we raised will not be addressed. The uncertainty of the law is obviously beneficial to law enforcement."

"Citizens have the right to practice religion together without creating religious associations," Chugunov [noted on 18 May 2025](#). "If citizens say that they have not created any group, then this is their legal right. To prove the opposite, criteria prescribed by law are needed. Without such criteria, all decisions to prohibit citizens from gathering contradict current legislation and the Constitution of the Russian Federation."

"The problem is not being solved deliberately," Chugunov believes.

"Because if criteria for creating religious groups are prescribed [as the Religion Law currently does not], this will clearly distinguish this right from the right to gather without creating associations. As a result, we have emerging tensions in state-religious relations, the blame for which, in my opinion, lies with the regulatory authorities, and not with believers. Believers are within their rights."

Lawsuits to ban religious communities' activities are invariably linked to accusations of "unlawful missionary activity". This is apparently both because it can be used as evidence of the de facto existence of a religious group, as in the 2022 Constitutional Court ruling, and because it provides additional grounds for prohibition, given that lack of notification is in itself not enough.

The written authorisation required by anyone conducting missionary activity on behalf of a religious group includes "written confirmation of receipt and registration of the notification of the [group's] creation and commencement of activities". The lack of such notification is therefore often taken as evidence of "unlawful missionary activity", even if no group in fact exists.

This is despite a [15 October 2018 Constitutional Court ruling](#) that failure to submit notification of the existence of a religious group does not in isolation constitute an offence under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity").

Krasnodar Region: Bailiffs seal church in Kurganinsk

On 16 May 2025, bailiffs sealed the doors of the Council of Churches Baptist church at 95 Engels Street in the Krasnodar Region town of Kurganinsk. They were enforcing a court order issued more than eight months earlier, prohibiting the activities of the more than 600-strong community unless it submitted notification of its existence. Three days later, officials warned Pastor Aleksandr Chmykh that unless he fulfilled the court's demands, he would face criminal prosecution.

The church had been meeting in its place of worship which it built in 2012 to replace an earlier structure dating from 1991.

In the three months since bailiffs sealed the church building, Baptists have met regularly for worship outside. Having exhausted all options for appeal in lower courts, the community is now awaiting the consideration of their appeal to the Supreme Court in Moscow. This is due to hear the case on 28 August 2025.

"Last Sunday I witnessed church members old and young praying on their knees, right on the pavement," the administrator of Portal Vernost, a Baptist Telegram channel, [wrote on 29 July](#). "The brothers have one heart

and one spirit. The church defends its independence from the state. The church in Kurganinsk needs our prayers for steadfastness and faithfulness to the end."

Kurganinsk District Court banned the church's activities on 6 September 2024, upholding an administrative lawsuit lodged by Kurganinsk District Prosecutor's Office "in the interests of an undefined circle of persons". This was despite the church's lawyer's argument that "the law in terms of the obligation to submit notification contradicts the Constitution of the Russian Federation and violates freedom of religion, and also interferes with the activities of the Church".

According to the court ruling, seen by Forum 18, prosecutors argued that "In the building of the House of Prayer .. with the participation of residents of [Krasnodar Region] and neighbouring regions, including minors and missionaries and foreign citizens, illegal missionary religious events are systematically held". They requested that the court ban the community's activities on the territory of Kurganinsk "until the violations are eliminated by submitting notification to the Office of the Ministry of Justice of Krasnodar Region about the beginning of the group's activities".

Judge Vitaly Yakonov stated that "Despite the fact that this group has existed for many years, [and] the provisions of the law on submitting notification of the creation and operation of a religious group have been in effect since 2015, to date this group has not notified [the Justice Ministry] in writing of the beginning of the activities of the religious group.."

The Judge concluded that this "leads to a violation of the [1997 Religion Law] and creates a threat to the security of public interests, national security, [and] public order, as well as the rights and interests of an undefined circle of persons involved in the activities of the group through illegal missionary activity".

Pastor Aleksandr Chmykh appealed unsuccessfully against the ruling at Krasnodar Regional Court on 26 November 2024 (after which the decision entered legal force), and again at the 4th Cassational Court in Krasnodar on 7 May 2025. Throughout this time, the church continued to hold services, meetings and conferences.

Bailiffs fined Pastor Chmykh 50,000 Roubles on 13 February 2025 for "not fulfilling the demands of the court", the Caucasian Association of Council of Churches Baptists [noted](#). He does not yet appear to be subject to criminal prosecution.

Forum 18 wrote to Kurganinsk District Court asking:

- why it had upheld the prosecutors' request to prohibit the church's activities;

- and whether the church would be able to resume operations if it submits notification of its existence.

The court press service's response of 17 March ignored Forum 18's first question. The response confirmed, however, that the court decision suspended the church's activities "until the elimination of violations by means of sending notification of the beginning of the activities of a religious group to the Office of the Justice Ministry for Krasnodar Region. After the elimination of violations, activity can be resumed."

Forum 18 wrote to Krasnodar Regional Prosecutor's Office on 8 August, asking why prosecutors had sought a ban on the church's activities. Forum 18 had received no reply by the end of the working day of 20 August.

"Any citizen has the right to profess any religion with others, both by creating religious associations and without creating them", the Council of Churches Intercession Department [stated in its account of the case on 24 May 2025](#). "Citizens have the right to gather together and pray without fulfilling any conditions. The law does not provide for punishment for failure to submit notification. Thus, all decisions to prohibit citizens from gathering contradict current legislation and the Constitution of the Russian Federation."

Surveillance, multiple prosecutions

The Kurganinsk prosecutors based their lawsuit on the prosecution of Pastor Aleksandr Chmykh for "unlawful missionary activity", videos of worship services and other events on the church's YouTube channel, and their own inspection of the premises, itself triggered by FSB surveillance of "systematic conduct of illegal missionary religious events", including "an unauthorised mass event 'Conference on Evangelism' of the Caucasian Association of the International Union of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists", attended by more than 1,000 people.

Kurganinsk District Magistrate's Court No. 167 [fined Pastor Chmykh](#) 5,000 Roubles under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity") on 18 March 2024 for having "organised and conducted worship services in Kurganinsk, by which he violated the requirements of the [Religion Law], namely, he did not submit in the established order notification of the beginning of the activities of the religious group to the Justice Ministry".

The worship services in question were in fact a two-day conference of the Caucasian Association of Council of Churches in January 2024, according to the Council of Churches-Baptists Intercession Department. Five other Baptists who participated in the event [were also prosecuted](#) under Article 5.26, Part 4.

Forum 18 wrote to Kurganinsk District Magistrate's Court No. 167 on 11 March to ask why it had found Pastor Chmykh guilty of "unlawful missionary activity" when the events in question took place inside the church and only fellow Baptists were present. Forum 18 had received no response by the end of the working day of 20 August.

Forum 18 wrote to the Krasnodar Region branch of the Federal Security Service (FSB) on 7 March, asking why a church conference was considered an "unauthorised mass event" when held inside the church itself, and why it was considered "unlawful missionary activity" if only fellow believers were present. Forum 18 had received no response by the end of the working day of 20 August.

On the second day of another conference on 14-15 December 2024, a police inspector arrived at the church. He questioned church leaders, and drew up two protocols against Pastor Chmykh under Article 5.26, Part 4, one for each day of the event. He did not interrupt the worship service, the Council of Churches Intercession Department [noted](#).

On 10 February 2025, the magistrate's court again found Pastor Chmykh guilty and fined him a total of 20,000 Roubles for the two alleged offences of conducting "unlawful missionary activity" without having submitted notification of the activities of a religious group. His appeals to Kurganinsk District Court and the 4th Cassational Court were rejected without consideration, the last of them on 18 June 2025.

Krasnodar Region: Belorechensk Court ban in force but church still active

Belorechensk District Court banned the activities of the Council of Churches Baptist church in the village of Rodniki on Christmas Eve, 24 December 2024. The ruling came into force on 3 April 2025, when Pastor Vladimir Gordiyenko appealed unsuccessfully at Krasnodar Regional Court.

Belorechensk Inter-District Prosecutor's Office lodged its administrative lawsuit on 15 November 2024, requesting that the court prohibit the church's activities until the "violations" it had found during an inspection are "eliminated", ie. notification submitted. Again, prosecutors linked this to convictions of church members for "unlawful missionary activity". Unlike in other cases, however, this occurred outside the community's place of worship, when church members visited Belorechensk Central District Hospital at Easter 2024.

Zinaida Shcherbakova, Aleksandr Skorev, Ali Gamoyev, Pavel Litovkin, and Daniil Litovkin sang hymns, handed out gifts, and distributed copies of the Baptist newspaper "Do you believe?". A hospital doctor reported this to

police, who charged all five under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 for having carried out missionary activity without notifying the Justice Ministry of the existence of their religious group.

Belorechensk District Magistrate's Court No. 127 fined all five church members 5,000 Roubles each on 2 August 2024 (only Daniil Litovkin appealed, unsuccessfully, at Belorechensk District Court on 27 September 2024).

In their inspection of "compliance with legislation on freedom of conscience and religious associations", prosecutors found that Pastor Gordiyenko "is not taking measures to eliminate violations in the activities of the religious group 'House of Prayer of Evangelical Christian-Baptists' .. namely, that the religious group has not notified [the Justice Ministry] in writing of the beginning of the activities of the religious group".

The church's lawyer argued in court that any obligation to submit notification "must be supported by a measure of state coercion, which in itself violates the constitutional principle of freedom of conscience". The lawyer argued that prosecutors had incorrectly interpreted Article 7 of the Religion Law (on religious groups) and Article 14, which sets out reasons for prohibiting the activities of a religious association, which include, among others, coercion, incitement to suicide, and use of narcotics, but not failure to submit notification.

Judge Roman Cherepov nevertheless agreed with the Justice Ministry's written submission to the court, which stated: "[The Religion Law] links the right of a religious group to carry out missionary activities .. with compliance with the specified notification procedure for the activities of religious groups", and that while "religious organisations have the right to conduct religious rites and ceremonies in medical and hospital institutions at the request of citizens located therein", the church is not a religious organisation, "which confirms that it is carrying out unlawful missionary activities".

The Rodniki church, which has existed since 1996, appears to have remained active since the court decision entered legal force. Like its counterpart in Kurganinsk, however, it is now vulnerable to being sealed by bailiffs. The community has not yet lodged a cassational appeal, but has until 15 October 2025 to do so.

Forum 18 asked Krasnodar Regional Prosecutor's Office on 8 August why prosecutors had sought a ban on the church's activities.

The same day, Forum 18 asked Kurganinsk District Court:

- why it had upheld the prosecutors' request to prohibit the church's activities;
- and whether the church would be able to resume operations if it submits

notification of its existence.

Forum 18 had received no reply from either by the end of the working day of 20 August.

Mari El Republic: Yoshkar-Ola Court bans church's activities, ruling not yet in force

On 24 July 2025, Yoshkar-Ola City Court upheld prosecutors' request to have the activities of the city's Council of Churches Baptist church prohibited "until violations of federal legislation are eliminated by submitting notification of the beginning of activities of the religious group", according to the court ruling, seen by Forum 18.

Yoshkar-Ola City Prosecutor's Office, which lodged its administrative lawsuit on 23 June 2025, noted that the church "carries out religious worship, accordingly its activities affect the rights and legitimate interests of an undefined circle of persons".

The lawsuit named four church members – Viktor Araslanov and Svetlana Araslanova (in whose house the congregation meets), Ferdinand Gayfullin, and Anatoly Chendemirov – as respondents in the case. They now have until 5 September 2025 to appeal.

In this instance, prosecutions for "unlawful missionary activity" from several years before formed part of the basis for the lawsuit. "The prosecutor referred to the fact that, in 2020, some respondents [were fined](#) under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity") and Article 8.8 Part 1, a lawyer familiar with the case noted to Forum 18. "The court accepted this as evidence that the religious group actually existed and moreover, committed violations of the law."

The church members' lawyer argued that they posed no threat to public order or security, and that only relatives and acquaintances attend the weekly Sunday meetings in order to pray together, not carry out missionary activity.

Judge Irina Smirnova disagreed, concluding that the religious group's failure over many years to submit notification "leads to a violation of [the Religion Law] and creates a threat to the security of public interests, national security, public order, as well as the rights and interests of an undefined circle of persons involved in the activities of the group through unlawful missionary activity".

As well as the lack of notification and the five-year-old convictions for "unlawful missionary activity", the judge took into account FSB surveillance of the Araslanovs' house. This had observed that "30 people entered the building .. and were inside it at the same time". The judge also took account of the testimony of a witness, who said that an elderly man

had given him a religious brochure near the city's central market in the spring of 2025 and invited him to Sunday services.

When the witness attended, "about 60 people were in the room, including children, the meeting was led by Viktor Araslanov, he read and commented on passages from Holy Scripture, then hymn singing and general prayers began, those who spoke called their meeting a church, in the second half of the event the communion ceremony was held".

Forum 18 asked Yoshkar-Ola City Prosecutor's Office on 11 August why it had sought a ban on the church's activities. Forum 18 had received no reply by the end of the working day of 20 August.

Forum 18 asked Yoshkar-Ola City Court on 8 August:

- why it had upheld prosecutors' request to prohibit the church's activities;
- and whether this prohibition would be lifted if the community submitted notification.

Court chair Artyom Morozov responded, not answering Forum 18's questions, and stating that the court "does not give clarification on issues of current legislation", and "in accordance with the principles of independence and impartiality of the judicial system", does not have the right to "advise citizens on matters of a legal nature".

Two more churches in court: Blagoveshchensk and Timashyovsk

On 30 September 2025, Blagoveshchensk City Court in the Russian Far East is due to consider a civil lawsuit brought by prosecutors seeking to ban the activities of the Council of Churches Baptist church in the city.

The City Prosecutor's Office, the Amur Region branch of the FSB and National Guard, and Emergencies Ministry personnel carried out an "inspection of the legality of the use of the house of prayer" on 27 May 2025. They questioned Pastor Vladislav Girko.

Officials then summoned him twice in early June to the prosecutor's office, "where he was familiarised with the lawsuit to compel the registration of the church", the Urgent Prayer Messages Telegram channel [reported on 13 June 2025](#).

"The 'inspection' predictably 'revealed' the illegality of holding religious meetings in the house, and during the 'questioning' Girko was strongly recommended to register the community, warning that in case of refusal, criminal liability would follow", Novaya Gazeta Europe [commented on the case on 12 August 2025](#).

Prosecutors lodged their lawsuit on 11 June 2025 (why this is a civil, rather than an administrative, suit is unclear).

Prosecutors also charged Pastor Girko with "unlawful missionary activity" under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 and "violation of requirements for anti-terrorist protection of a facility" under Administrative Code Article 20.35, Part 2. A magistrate's court fined him 5,000 Roubles on 29 July 2025 for the former offence, according to Novaya Gazeta Europe. It is unclear which court considered the case, or whether the "anti-terrorism" prosecution reached court. Girko's appeal against the Article 5.26 conviction is due to be heard at Blagoveshchensk City Court on 8 September 2025, according to court records.

On 3 September 2025, Timashyovsk District Court in Krasnodar Region is due to rule on whether to prohibit the activities of Timashyovsk's Council of Churches Baptist church. It had postponed the hearing from 19 August.

Timashyovsk District Prosecutor's Office lodged its lawsuit – also a civil suit – on 10 July 2025. According to Baptist Telegram channels, prosecutors are again accusing the community of having carried out "unlawful missionary activity". There appear to have been no recent prosecutions of church members under Article 5.26, Part 4 in the local area.

Nikolay Antonyuk is a pastor at the Timashyovsk church and chair of the Council of Churches since 2009. A court fined him for "unlawful missionary activity" at the same 2024 conference in Kurganinsk which led to the prosecution of Kurganinsk pastor Aleksandr Chmykh and the later banning of his church's activities. (END)

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