

Russian Orthodox leader chides faithful over sloppy dress

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(RNS) A top official of the Russian Orthodox Church has called for an official dress code to encourage propriety after previously suggesting that provocatively dressed women provoke immorality and violence.

"Vulgar external appearance and vulgar behavior is a straight path to misery," Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin said in an open letter published on the site of the Interfax news agency.

"To empty `one-night stands.' To short marriages followed by rat-like divorces. To children with broken fates. To loneliness and madness. To catastrophes in life."

A woman who is "barely wearing any clothes or is painted like a clown" in the hopes of meeting a man, he writes, risks meeting a "drunk idiot" or at best a "sober idiot."

Chaplin, a top aide to Patriarch Kirill, proposed a "Russia-wide dress code," saying it should apply to men as well.

Chaplin, who is in charge of the Moscow Patriarchate's department on church and society and is known for his provocative statements, was responding to a petition protesting comments he made last month when he

suggested immodestly dressed women invite rape.

"If she wears a mini-skirt, she might provoke not only a man from the Caucasus, but a Russian as well," Chaplin said at the roundtable in Moscow. "If she is also drunk, she is all the more likely to provoke them. If she is also actively seeking contact and is then surprised that this contact ends in rape, then she is all the more wrong."

In their petition, critics accused Chaplin of "replacing public discourse on the problem of violence against women with discussion of their external appearance."

Kirill, too, has spoken out against the gloomy appearance of many women, and said Orthodoxy should present a friendlier face. While some priests and parishes encourage women to wear long, dark skirts and do not allow women with uncovered heads to enter churches, rules have become increasingly more liberal and headscarves and skirts are not mandatory in most Moscow churches.

Metropolitan Hilarion, who chairs the church's external relations department, said last summer that too many female parishioners wear pants, and that skirts are considered the clothing of Muslim women.