

Head of Serbian Orthodox Church dies of COVID-19

by [Dawn Araujo-Hawkins](#) in the [December 30, 2020](#) issue



(AP Photo / Darko Vonjinovic)

Patriarch Irinej, head of the Serbian Orthodox Church, died of COVID-19 on November 20 at the age of 90. He contracted the virus three weeks earlier while officiating the large, public funeral of a senior bishop who had died of COVID-19.

According to reports, mourners at the bishop's funeral did not wear masks or maintain social distancing. Many of them also kissed his body, which was in an open casket. Local health officials had flagged the funeral as a health risk.

Irinej was installed as patriarch in 2010 and quickly made a name for himself as a conservative, with his criticism of the West and vocal opposition to abortion and LGBTQ rights. By the time of his death, he wielded considerable political influence in

Serbia.

“Patriarch Irinej was a great man of the Serbian church, Orthodox Christianity, and our Serb nation,” wrote Serbian president Aleksandar Vucic in a letter to the church’s executive body. The government also declared three days of national mourning.