

Head of Serbian Orthodox Church hospitalized with COVID-19

People in the [December 2, 2020](#) issue



(AP Photo / Darko Vojinovic)

The 90-year-old patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church was hospitalized after testing positive for the coronavirus, days after leading prayers at a large public funeral for the head of the church in Montenegro, who died after contracting the virus.

On November 4, the Serbian Orthodox Church said that Patriarch Irinej was hospitalized but had no COVID-19 symptoms and was in “excellent general condition.”

The next day, Serbia’s Defense Ministry said that the patriarch was admitted to a military hospital in Belgrade where he could be under “medical supervision and control.” The ministry said he was in good condition and did not have a fever or

other signs of illness.

On November 1, Patriarch Irinej led the prayers inside a packed church for the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro, Bishop Amfilohije, who had died after contracting COVID-19.

Many of the people inside the Montenegrin church did not wear protective face masks or keep their distance from one another, in violation of restrictions to fight coronavirus. Many kissed the bishop's body in an open coffin.

Among those in the church were Serbian president Aleksandar Vucic and Montenegrin prime minister-designate Zdravko Krivokapic.

Montenegro and Serbia have seen a surge in virus infections in the past weeks. Montenegro authorities warned that Bishop Amfilohije's funeral created a major health threat.

The Serbian Orthodox Church is also the main church in Montenegro, a fellow Slavic and Orthodox Christian nation. About one-third of Montenegro's 620,000 people identify as Serbs.

Bishop Amfilohije was highly popular among pro-Serb Montenegrins who advocate closer ties with Serbia following Montenegro's split from a joint state in 2006.

—Associated Press